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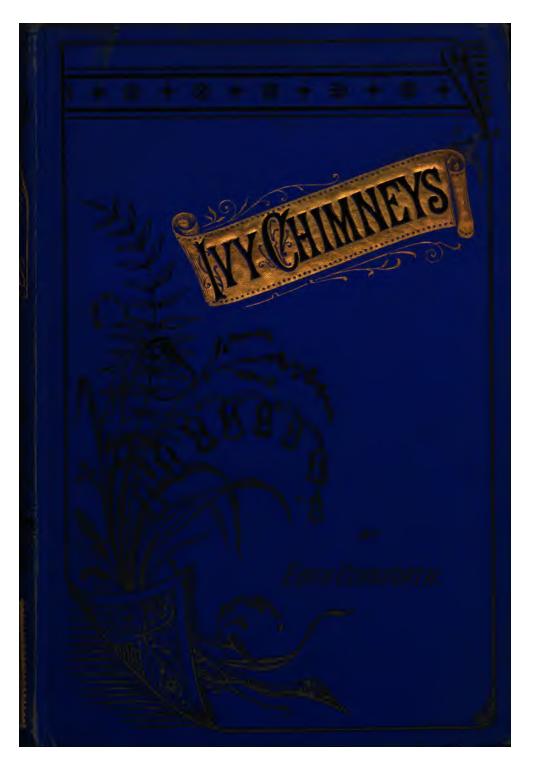
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# IVY CHIMNEYS.

BY

### EDITH CORNFORTH.



#### WESLEYAN-METHODIST SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION,

2, Ludgate Circus Bldgs., E.C.; 2, Castle Street, City Road, E.C.

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WAYMAN BROTHERS AND LILLY,
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LONDON, E.C.



HE object of this story is to strengthen the longing—sometimes, perhaps, vague and hardly recognised—which the writer believes to exist in many hearts, to help the childish waifs of our great cities.

Few girls are free, like Myrtle Shaxon, to originate and carry on a home for destitute children; and yet each reader might surely do something to help those noble men and women who make it their life-work to care for the neglected little ones of our land.

Bluff, the golden-haired, blue-eyed trickster, with the sweet baby face, is no imaginary character. Under the circumstances, his beauty is possibly rare, but alas! the want, and the knowledge of crime, which this child of four had learned during his brief life, are too widely extended.

E. C.

March, 1885.



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'LOVE THOU THY SORROW; GRIEF SHALL BRING

ITS OWN EXCUSE IN AFTER YEARS;

THE RAINBOW! SEE HOW FAIR A THING

GOD HATH BUILT UP FROM TEARS.'—Henry Sutton.



## IVY GHIMNEYS.

#### CHAPTER I.

#### A HARD DECREE.

'The face was pale and wan—As I laye athynkynge—oh! bitter flow'd the tear!'

dawn one chill October morning,

William Shaxon turned the latchkey in the door of his house in Arbour Square, off the Commercial Road. He went in quietly to avoid rousing his invalid wife and their two children; but he need not have taken that precaution, because, seated on the lowest stair waiting for his appearance, he saw Willie and Myrtle, who had both fallen asleep. At the sound of his step, the boy opened his eyes, and catching sight of the anxiously longed-for face, he unclasped his sister's arms from round his neck, and followed

his father, who carried her into the sittingroom. Hardly aware of what he was doing, Willie stirred up the fire and set the kettle on the blaze.

'How is mother?' asked the man, who did not notice anything unusual in the children being up so early, but set to work in cutting slices from the loaf of bread that stood on the soiled breakfast cloth.

'Mother is dead,' answered Willie calmly, for while waiting half the night on that bottom stair he had grown familiar with the silence in the house and strange dreariness of death-

'Dead,' echoed his father—'dead'—and he shivered from head to foot.

'You had not long been gone to the office,' continued Willie, 'when mother called me up; for I always sleep with my door open so that I can hear her if she calls. She was very restless for a while and then grew quiet, till after a bit she said, 'Fetch Myrtle'; and while I ran into the next room she died, for when we both hurried to her bedside she lay quite silent and still. Myrtle cried dreadfully when she found that mother took no notice of her, so presently I dressed her, and we just

sat down in the passage and waited till you came home.'

'Why did you not call in a neighbour,' asked the man, who was altogether unhinged by the sad tidings, and who still sat stunned and helpless beside the bright fire.

'How could I leave mother alone?' replied Willie with unconscious pathos. 'Shall I go now and ask Mrs. Hunt to come?'

'Not till we hear somebody astir next door. Stay beside the child while I go upstairs;' and with a slow, reluctant step he mounted the stairs and entered the room. All was just as he had left it a few short hours ago, except that most wonderful change in his wife, who lay before him with death's pallor upon her face, for to her the end of all things mortal had come.

As he stood beside the bed a wave of memory rushed over his mind. Once again he was young, and life promised fair; for amidst the forest shades he wandered with the gipsy maiden to whom he had given his heart, and for whom he held such hopes. Beside that still, upturned face he forgot the years of the ill-assorted union; the misery of those days

when his wife, grown weary of the restraints of civilised life, and neglectful of her children and home, escaped back to the lawless freedom of the gipsy camp from which she was reclaimed but to sicken and to die. At first, earlier, softer memories banished all feeling of having been made thus to suffer, but in time these were succeeded by sterner thoughts and hard resolves for the future of her children.

Because of this woman's uncurbed love of nature, and for the irresponsible life of the vagrant, she had hated the pleasant town home which her husband had provided, and dragged him down in the social scale until he had been glad to hide himself in his present comfortless home. The love of husband and children had counted for nothing in comparison with her passion for freedom, and the wandering life of her tribe; and in the end this had led her to make an outcast of herself. and to pierce her husband's heart with anguish and regret. For through it all he had loved her, and his worst suffering had arisen from the fact of his utter inability to make her happy. And now, beside the dead mother he looked forward to the future of their children; weighed mentally their chances of respectability and success in life; and he vowed that he would so fence in their lot, that whatever taint of gipsy blood they possessed should have no temptation to reveal itself. Born and bred in London, here should they remain. Shut in by houses and all the noise and activity of the town, what could wake such longings as had wrecked their parents' lives?

Strong in this new purpose, William Shaxon left the chamber of death, and in turning the key upon its awful silence, he locked behind all the gentler, more loving part of his own nature. In the days that immediately followed, his children learned to fear him-until now an unknown sensation in their bosoms. While he pursued his work on the night staff of a popular newspaper, they clung more fondly to each other, and little Myrtle looked up to her tall brother with increasing confidence. Before long the children had grown used to the new state of things. father had secured a maid to take charge of all domestic arrangements, and fortunately she was kind and good-tempered in her dealings with them; and, as they were free to

amuse themselves in their own way, they were happy and contented.

Meanwhile their father's misery grew so heavy that it threatened to overpower him, and the old routine became insupportable. When things were at their worst a timely offer from the authorities at the newspaper office gave a new bent to his thoughts, and awoke a fresh interest in his life. William Shaxon accepted a good post as Asiatic correspondent, and took his leave of England for several years. Our interest lies with the fortunes of the gipsy's children, whose fate we will follow for a while.





#### CHAPTER II.

#### A LONELY CHILD..

'I know the children run Seeing her come, for naught that I discover, Save that she brings the summer and the sun.'

HEN Mr. Shaxon decided to go abroad, he was in doubt as to the best way of providing a home for his children, but that difficulty vanished after an interview with an old family friend named Mrs. Story.

It was on a Sunday afternoon that he walked through the labyrinth of small streets which led him into Hoxton, where she lived. Had he taken the two children with him they would have seen nothing to awake that country longing which he so much dreaded for them, and perhaps the absence

of this danger suggested the idea of their removing from Stepney into the sister-neighbourhood of Hoxton.

At any rate, he opened his heart freely to the grave, elderly friend, who had known all his sad domestic history; and whose prejudice had been strong against the untutored girl whom he had introduced into the circle of his family and friends.

Since that day time had done something to soften Mrs. Story's nature, but it was late in life for her to undertake the care of children, and at first she declared such a thing to be impossible; yet in the end she consented to open her home to Willie and Myrtle, and bound herself by a solemn promise to keep strict guard over their actions, so that they could not violate their father's command against their gaining a knowledge of the country.

'I will instruct my lawyer, Mr. Mills, to pay you part of the income arising from my small property in Essex; and in a few years, when expenses are heavier, I will forward money from abroad. I should like them both to receive a good education, and

to grow up intelligent and cultured, so that they may not shame my name. Let them take an interest in music and art; and if necessary, engage a governess for the girl who will sympathise with her in a fondness for these things; only be sure she is a genuine Londoner and no romantic country miss, who will instil pastoral ideas. And now I must say good-bye. Thank you most heartily for your kindness in accepting such a burden, and above all remember your promise;' and more than satisfied with this arrangement. William Shaxon parted from Mrs. Story under the flattering impression of having discharged his duty to his children. From that time until the hour when he sailed he was absorbed in the preparation for the voyage, and in the effort to banish from his memory the thought of his wife's grave beneath the shadow of the rustic church where they were married.

Willie and Myrtle stayed on in their own home until the very last; and it was a wet dreary day in February when, after saying good-bye to their neighbours, they left behind the dismal square garden to which they both clung fondly, and in which they had spent some of their happiest hours.

Willie, who was just fourteen, and eight years older than his little sister, was at an age when the notion of being under an old lady's authority was specially provoking, and he hated the idea of this life to which they were going. During the journey in the cab he relieved his mind by indulging in gloomy forebodings of the desperate measures which he should try to bring Mrs. Story to her senses if she proved strict or unkind.

It was a relief to Myrtle when the cab stopped, and they were safely housed, and their luggage carried indoors. Mrs. Story had a comfortable tea ready for them, and the sight of a nice cake and a dish of ham went a long way towards reconciling Willie to their new quarters. They were pleased also with their neat little bedrooms, for until now they had not known much domestic comfort, and they were impressed when they saw how much had been done in the prospect of their coming. Jane, the kindhearted maid, gave them a warm welcome, and when the tea was over, let them

inspect her spotless kitchen and make themselves at home in her special domain. Willie, boylike, asked innumerable questions, and handled her tin things; while he wanted to know the use of this, or the mechanism of that. Jane answered his questions and bore with his mischief: indeed, before long she became a willing slave to the handsome, imperious boy, who won over Mrs. Story as well, and thrived under the regular, yet kindly rule of his new home.

It was different with Myrtle. She lacked the self-assertion by which Willie, who was so much older, carried all before him, and her more timid, reticent nature failed to win much affection, either from the mistress or maid. About this time also Willie began to fail her. Now that the fair-haired little sister was no longer dependent on his care, and in the excitement of an entrance into the City of London School, he grew neglectful of Myrtle, and laughed at her gentle amusements as "babyish." What loneliness of heart the child endured it is impossible to say. wooden tea things lost their power to please; the little flat iron failed to amuse. Her large

family of dolls—those sympathetic creatures who laugh in echo to their mother's joy, or weep in response to her griefs—were left untended day after day and doomed to the monotony of the large bottom drawer that was set apart for their home in the little girl's room. Myrtle obediently plodded along the weary hem or seam by which Mrs. Story taught her to sew; and week after week, the small, unskilful hands struggled with the darning needle which was supposed to keep Willie's socks in repair.

It was a harder task still to learn to read after Mrs. Story's method; for she had unshaken faith in Goldsmith's History and Magnall's Questions as lesson books. Myrtle also missed the freedom which had been so pleasant in Arbour Square, where Eliza had allowed them to go out and come in pretty much as they liked, and without any harmful result. In those old times they sometimes strayed as far as the docks, where they found endless amusement.

Used to such freedom and the romantic and picturesque interest with which the two children had unconsciously, yet richly invested it. Myrtle felt the constraint of her new home sadly. Mrs. Story thought an hour's sedate walking all that was necessary for health; so Myrtle schooled herself to restrain her dancing movements to suit the elderly woman's step, and to be content with walking through the monotonous streets, or worse still, to go with her on her frequent rounds of shopping. She began to hate the sight of the sleek butcher, the independent fishmonger, and the low-spirited greengrocer. Indeed, the child was growing ill under the influence of her uncongenial life, which at this time had only one bright spot-she counted the hours between Sunday and Sunday.

And what made her look forward to those hours when she sat beside Mrs. Story in her pew at the unpretending Wesleyan Chapel, where she was a member of the Society?

What other lonely children have found in the colours of some quaint cathedral window, or in the music of an organ, or the sculptured form upon a monument, Myrtle had won from a living face that met her glance in the opposite pew. You will not understand this joy of hers unless you also have a natural delight in the beautiful. She saw it for the first time one dismal Sunday morning when Willie had made an excuse to stay in, and she had been obliged to come to chapel without him. Her heart felt so sore with disappointment at Willie's desertion, that during the hymn and prayer she could only just manage to keep the tears from falling, and it was not until the reading of the first lesson that she chanced to look over to the opposite pew, which was usually empty. day there were two people in it, a grey-haired gentleman and his daughter, a bright young maiden; and as they were both reading their Bibles, Myrtle could gaze at them with the frank stare in which only children and dogs are privileged to indulge.

Though the father was a nice-looking man, she hardly gave him a thought, so much was she attracted by the young face beside him. And indeed, Mona Stevington might have rewarded a more intelligent criticism than a child's, though our little girl had, by some subtle instinct, read her lovely face aright. She was fair, happy, and good. Used to the fondest affection and indulgence herself, she

gave as freely as she received. She possessed an unusual degree of sympathy, and her love flowed freely towards those with whom she came in contact, and from whom she took love as if they had nothing less in their power to give. She was also unselfish and generous; while to all these attractions of character there was added the personal charm of beauty.

Little Myrtle, who still wore heavy crape for her mother, looked across at this sweet stranger, and lost her heart straight away. She longed to stroke the velvet which so well set off the clear skin and golden hair that appealed so strongly to her childish fancy. Once the young lady caught the gaze of Myrtle's earnest eyes, and actually smiled back again, as if she too was looking at something pleasant to the eye. Myrtle blushed, and then to her own surprise a rush of tears blinded her, and she crept down into the bottom of the pew, and cried as if her heart would break. That loving smile had shown as in a flash all the dreary extent of her poverty, and she realised what a poor life she was living, and how little love it contained,

and the weight of loneliness which oppressed her; for no one had yet tried to guide her to the Saviour, who has such wonderful love for little children, that when they turn to Him for happiness, He never sends them away disappointed. Still He had not forgotten her; for even while she cried in her loneliness at the bottom of the pew, where Mrs. Story had the good sense to leave her to herself, the Good Shepherd was whispering to Mona Stevington's heart that this was one of His lambs to be cared for, for His sake. And Mona, responsive to His call, answered gladly, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.'





#### CHAPTER III.

#### SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

'Something in the dress
That told the girl unmothered;
Or was it that the merciless black garb of mourning
smothered
Life and all light,'

arm and the pair walked briskly home. They lived in an old-fashioned house on the outskirts of Canonbury, which was replete with every comfort. Here Mona had been born; and both she and her father would not have exchanged it for one in a more fashionable neighbourhood without regret. The walls lined with books and pictures, the furniture so out of date yet in harmony with its surroundings, and the contented,

uneventful life were inexpressibly dear to Mr. Stevington and his child.

It was here that the young wife had been so happy for a while, and then died without a fear because she was going to be with Christ, 'which is far better.'

Sometimes the pair would wander off to foreign lands and spend a few months away from home, on account of Mr. Stevington's health, but they always returned to it more gladly than ever; he, to the enjoyment of his fine library, and Mona to the society of her young friends, to her light domestic cares, and to shed a loving influence wherever she went. Mr. Stevington was no selfish recluse, though a bookworm; and it cannot be denied that it cost him an effort to fulfil his vocation as a leading Wesleyan layman, but he spared neither labour nor money where the interests of his Church were concerned.

When the cloth was removed on this particular Sunday morning, Mona, with a plate of fruit on her knee, settled herself on a low stool beside Mr. Stevington's chair, and presently asked, 'Father, dear, did you notice anything special in chapel?'

- 'Certainly. Several things, but chiefly the subtle line of thought in the very excellent sermon.'
- 'It was rather beyond my grasp. I meant did you notice the pale child with Mrs. Story.'
- 'I did just see that there was a becraped morsel of humanity, but nothing further.'
- 'She looked a sweet, wistful little creature, and something upset her, for she cried bitterly, and seemed such a sad little object as she made her escape down the aisle.'
- 'Doubtless she is in good hands if she is with Mrs. Story.'
- 'Do you think so?' asked Mona. 'Is she not rather strict and prim to have the care of a motherless child?'
- 'Eh, Mona, at your tricks again. What a born meddler you are. Never a man or woman, boy or girl, can come into the chapel but you must find out all about them, and scrape up some sort of an acquaintance. Certainly it will do no harm to try and cheer a little girl; and I will tell you what part I will take in the effort. If you like to dress a miracle of a doll and put it on your stall at this bazaar for

which you are daily emptying my purse, I will buy it, and you shall hand it over to this friend of Sister Story's.'

'Oh, daddy, what a brilliant idea. We will go the Burlington Arcade to-morrow and buy one. You must help to choose it as you used to do for my birthday present.'

'You ridiculous child! I shall do nothing of the kind; you must take one of the maids if you go so far.'

'Perhaps that would be best; you would be in too much haste for me to make a choice.'

'What have you done with all those dolls that I bought you—the last not so very long ago either.'

'They are safely housed in the school-room, but it is some time since I saw them.'

'The schoolroom, indeed; I fear you have not troubled it so much. I am not sure that it is not my duty to shut you up there for a couple of years, and set you to master some of the lessons that our long wanderings have interrupted. You are only a school girl still in years, though you are such an experienced traveller.'

Mona did not show the least alarm, and while meditating on the subject, her father lost himself in a doze, and when he roused up at the entrance of one of the Circuit ministers who had come in to drink tea, the idea had quite escaped him.

Meanwhile Myrtle had also returned home, and eased by the relief of tears, she sat meekly between Mrs. Story and Willie at dinner time. Her brother was merry and talkative as usual; somewhat too boastful of his own doings amongst his schoolfellows, and not the least careful to hide that all his interests lay beyond the grasp of a silly little girl, whom nobody could expect to care for anything besides babyish things. Glad when the meal was over, the child crept unnoticed to her room, and remembering her own wound by the negleet of those she loved, she opened the drawer where her children lay. There the poor things were, lonely and uncared for.

Little did Mrs. Story suspect, as she dozed over the last number of *The Christian Miscellany*, what a touching scene was being enacted overhead.

One by one Myrtle brought out her large

family of dolls. Most of them were maimed, and all of them old, but she caressed them each in turn, and promised them with tearful earnestness never to leave them unloved again. Violet, the beauty, was dressed in her best and seated on the pillow. Dolphus, the black soldier boy, was brushed and his clothes put more tidy. Alice, the lady whose stiff curls aggravated Willie to such an alarming extent that he had been known to threaten to cut them off, was dressed in her bonnet and mantle, and set to simper at the others; and so on, all the way down till the list was completed by the baby in long clothes, which Eliza had bestowed as a parting gift. Soothed by this performance of duty, Myrtle returned to the sitting room, where she found Willie roasting chestnuts and eating oranges between whiles; and while sharing in this exciting business, the sadness passed from the child's face, and her laugh rang out in echo to her brother's. Presently Jane brought in the teatray, and Mrs. Story came in with her spectacles pushed high on her forehead and a book in her hand, but there was something heavy in her appearance, for as the maid shut the door, she muttered to herself, 'If Missis has not been asleep and snoring, I ain't a Primitive, nor a teetotaler neither.'

Still smiling at her own wit, she ran upstairs to turn down the beds, and was not a little startled to find the pillow in Myrtle's room occupied by an array of dolls.

'My word,' she said, 'there would be a pretty fuss if Missis knew what the child had been up to. I must tell her that she must not set out her playthings on a Sunday like any heathen Chinee. The unregenerate heart is mighty strong in Mr. Shaxon's children, let alone most of the others I know.'





### CHAPTER IV.

#### SOME CONFIDENTIAL TALKS.

'Words are easy like the wind, Faithful friends are hard to find.'

N unexpected visitor hindered Mona from going that week either to see Myrtle or to buy the new doll; so that her newly awakened sympathy wrought no immediate good to the child who still thought much of the stranger, while the recollection of the smile made her long for the next Sunday when she hoped to see her again. Willie had hurt his foot, and was kept a prisoner indoors, so that most of Myrtle's time was spent by his side, and he was glad to fall back upon her simple pleasures as a relief to the weary hours.

It was a happy change to escape from the dull round of daily life which fell to her share as constant companion to Mrs. Story. She liked having Willie all to herself on those evenings when their guardian went out to the weekly services, for she seldom missed either the preaching, the class, or the prayer-meeting. They used to have some strange talks at these times, for the boy was full of a spirit of adventure, and cherished many wild projects for the future.

'I hope you don't imagine that I shall stay poked up in London all my life,' he would say. 'I intend to write to father and ask him to bind me apprentice to the merchant service, and then I shall sail all over the world. It is all very well for a girl to learn to play on the piano, and how to put her bonnet on properly, but a boy has a good deal more to do in life. I shall have a fresh sweetheart each voyage, and perhaps end by marrying a shipowner's daughter, and sail the high seas in command of my own ship. Anyhow, I mean to have a jolly lark when I am grown up.'

'Suppose father won't do as you ask him?' Myrtle suggested, timidly, yet greatly

fascinated in spite of her fears by Willie's bold scheme.

'Then I shall run away to sea, and make my way from below the mast—heaps of fellows do that.'

'It would be a dreadful thing for a boy like you.'

'Not worse for me than for anybody else.'

'I don't know,' said Myrtle stoutly. 'You see, Willie, you are so fond of nice things to eat that Jane says she never knew a boy like you; and I heard Mrs. Story say that you could eat more cake and jam in a week than would last her a year, and you would not get much besides dumpling and salt pork at sea.'

'As if a fellow cared so much about what food he had if there was plenty of fun and danger going on. Silly, don't you see that it is as well to make the best of old Mother Story's domicile while we are cooped up in it; indeed it would be a pity if we did not get some fun out her, even if it is nothing better than a few musty cakes and some measly jam. If I had a mouthful of false teeth I don't suppose I should eat so much as I do

now—the nasty mean old thing,' concluded Willie, incoherently.

'She is not so bad as that,' said Myrtle, in defence of the absent, 'though sometimes I do think that her mother must have found her a most provoking child, for she never seems to have done anything except learn her lessons and sew her task.'

'I don't believe a word of it. I guess she was a regular Tartar by the way she sometimes fires out at me; however, you can both wait a bit, and then you will learn whether I have meant what I say. Some fine evening when the worthy matron Fib gets into a fine funk because I am out late, don't you blab, although you have a pretty good guess that I have cut this rotten old ship and spread my own sails.'

All this boasting did not trouble the bright-eyed listener, for she was used to hear about the wonderful things that Willie meant to do some day. So long as he changed his plans each time they talked she did not care, for she had enough sense to see that he could not carry out more than one, even if he ever

did that. Sometimes he would speak of becoming a great city merchant, and living in a fine house, with Myrtle as his housekeeper; and this was the only dream which in her heart she really favoured, for she could not enter into any of the others because the scenes in which they were laid were altogether without shape in her mind. She could imagine the grand house in London, but not the tempest-tossed ocean where Willie's ship would ride triumphantly through such extraordinary dangers; nor the gloomy depths of a forest, where tribes of wild foes must fall before his unerring gun. Indeed, when he came to such scenes her inattention grew so marked that he sometimes became angry, and broke off in the middle of an impossible adventure.

Another Sunday dawned, and again Myrtle saw the beautiful young face which had so suddenly stormed her heart; and again she was touched by a friendly smile. This time she blushed rosy red with pleasure, and grew dimpled with smiles in return.

On the following afternoon Mrs Story was gratified by receiving a visit from Mona, for Mr. Stevington was much respected in the Circuit, and any advance on his part, or his young daughter's, was welcomed by those in a different social position. Miss Stevington chatted on a little about general topics, and just touched upon the forthcoming Circuit bazaar, before she ventured to speak to the real point of her visit.

'Who is that little girl you bring to chapel, Mrs. Story?' she at last asked.

'You may well inquire, for it is strange at my time of life to be burdened with the care of children, but I have accepted it for old friendship's sake. Not but that they are good children, as children go now-a-days; for Willie is a high spirited lad, and the girl is quiet enough, and hardly any trouble; but I feel the responsibility weigh heavily upon me. father pays for their support, you understand, Miss Stevington: they don't cost me a penny -at least they are not supposed to do sothough who is to pay for the stair carpets which that boy is wearing out, I am sure I don't know. He rushes up and down, up and down, in his thick boots half the day through, and he won't bear a word of remonstrance however kindly spoken.'

- 'I had no idea that you had a boy as well.'
- 'I have the pair,' answered Mrs. Story with an attempt at resignation; 'so you can imagine what a charge they are.'
  - 'Do they go to school?'
  - 'Willie does, but I teach Myrtle myself.'

With extreme difficulty repressing one of her ready smiles, Mona observed, "Myrtle"—what a pretty name.

- 'Do you think so, my dear? It savours too much of the mother to please me.'
- 'Indeed,' said Mona, whose curiosity was roused by the manner of the good lady, who had pursed up her lips and wrinkled her brow in a significant way.
- 'You see, Miss Stevington, the Shaxons are a respectable family, and have been so for generations. I knew the grandmother of these children, when we were both as young as you are now. She married earlier in life than I did, and she was left a widow with one son before I even saw my husband that was to be. He was a beautiful boy and the pride of her heart, and she could deny him nothing, for she was a weak, tender creature. The

Shaxons had always lived on their land in Hackney (very different in those times to what it is now-a-days), and the men of the family had gone regularly to their house of business in the city, but this lad refused to follow in the beaten track. He declared he must see the world before he settled down, so he roved from country to country in an aimless fashion, until he had acquired unsettled habits that unfitted him for business life; and in time the firm declared themselves unwilling to take him into partnership, even if he could have tied himself to city life. When at last he did come back to England to remain, he went into Essex for a while to look after a small property in land that had come to him about that time; and it was while there that he took the fatal step which ruined his own life and broke his mother's heart.'

'What was that?' inquired Mona, now thoroughly interested.

'Well,' continued Mrs. Story, 'he must needs settle himself in one of his own tumbledown cottages, and attempt to write an history of the gipsies, in whose strange fate he took an interest. So to master his subject, he went

in and out amongst the vagrants and tramps that linger about Epping Forest; and the end of this was that he fell in with some genuine gipsies, and actually married a girl of pure gipsy descent. You may imagine what a blow this was to his mother; it broke her heart, but she kept that to herself, and by-and-by professed to be willing to receive the browneyed, dark-skinned girl as her daughter, and she took pains to train her into respecta-It was a long, painful struggle, and it ended in defeat. I believe the young wife did try, but habit and inclination were too strong, and she could not overcome her heathenish She neglected her children—several wavs. died of croup, but I don't mean to lay the blame of that upon her-and tried her husband at every point, until at last she escaped from the thraldom of his home, and went back to her own people.'

'Poor fellow! At last he settled down in earnest, and worked hard on the staff of a newspaper. With all his folly he had a good heart, for on learning that his wife was dying of a lingering disease, he sought her out—no easy matter—and persuaded her to come back

and let him nurse her. And he did so up to the very end, for she only died in the autumn of last year.'

- 'Have the children led an unsettled life?'
- 'O dear no! Willie was born within a year of the marriage, when they had moved near Mrs. Shaxon, and I do believe that the poor thing tried hard to be a good mother, and to learn domestic ways. When Myrtle was born the effort had long proved to be a failure. "Call her Myrtle," cried the mother (when they thought the baby would die, and so had called in a clergyman to christen her), "for she shall remind me of my own green past," and as they dared not contradict her that is how the child came by her outlandish name.'
- 'I like it,' exclaimed Mona, who was touched by the sad romance of the unhappy gipsy. 'What has become of the husband, that the children are left to your care like orphans?'
- 'His early habits have asserted themselves, and at present he is in China.'
- 'What a strange story to be connected with that little girl and her brother. I should like to see the boy.'

- 'There is still more to be told if you are not tired of the affair,' answered Mrs. Story; 'I dread the time when they grow older.'
  - 'Really!'
- 'I think the worst is yet to come, for here are these children who have inherited the gipsy blood of their mother, and the strong will of their father, and they are obliged to spend their minority in London. I am bound by a solemn promise to prevent them from seeing the country before they come of age. Mr. Shaxon put me upon my oath, and I was foolish enough to comply because of all I knew of the past.'
- 'Do you think they will obey you when they grow older and see other young people constantly go out of town?' Mona could not refrain from asking.

Mrs. Story's grey eyes winked with something very like a sense of humour, but her lips curved themselves into harder lines as she replied,

- 'I will make sure that the girl does, and it will be an unfortunate day for Willie when I find him out in disobedience.'
  - 'What a wretched restriction with which

to fetter them,' observed Mona, going back to the subject of the promise in a rather awkward way; 'the story has surprised me. May I come again one day and see Myrtle?'

'Indeed you may, Miss Mona. I am sorry that she is out to-day. I fear that she thinks I am a hard old woman, and I own that I don't take to her as I do to the boy; but all the same I have her true interest at heart, and should be only too thankful for her to have a friend like you. I doubt if I am the right person to deal with such a queer child.'

'Is she so strange?'

'She is such a quiet, self-contained little thing, and her eyes grow large and black if she is spoken sharply to, but she is much too proud to let us catch her crying. Now I like a babyish thing like her to sob out and have done with its fretting, so that a body can know what it is about. Master Willie will say out what he means, and grumble and fume if he is told of a fault; but then you can understand that, and comfort yourself by knowing that it is a gust of temper, and you know the way to deal with it; but I am not ashamed to confess that I am puzzled how to manage a little girl who

will break her heart in silence, and look pale for days after a quick word. Children were not so sensitive when I was her age, but things are different now-a-days.'

Mona had no answer to this, so she rose in a subdued way, and walked home wrapped in troubled thought. It was a relief to confide in her father, who was surprised and interested in her recital of Mrs. Story's account of her wards.





### CHAPTER V.

### AN EVENTFUL DAY.

'Rest, little stranger, rest thee here! Never was any child more dear!'

O a girl of Mona Stevington's temperament the history which she had heard was intensely painful, and she pitied Myrtle's fate from the bottom of her heart. Forsaken by both parents—for she counted Mr. Shaxon's conduct as no better than practical desertion, and fettered by that cruel restriction against all rural interests or change, she at first felt hopeless of doing anything that would really benefit the child. Anything that lay within her power seemed as nothing.

This feeling her father declared unworthy to be indulged: 'Do your part now, my child, and leave the future to God. He may be preparing your little friend for a special work, and teaching her, by this strange lot, the lessons that are necessary for her to master before she is fit for His purpose.'

- 'Alas! I am not wise like you. I cannot hope anything wonderful for that wee girl. Besides, there is a boy as well; and his mission at present seems to be the trial of Mrs. Story's patience.'
- 'I don't consider his case so bad as his sister's. Boys at a public school find vent for their energy in endless ways. Have you bought that doll?'
  - 'Not yet, father.'
- 'Then engage a brougham for to-morrow, and take Myrtle with you to the Burlington Arcade.'
- 'So I will,' said his daughter brightly; and she opened her writing case and choosing a sheet of paper with her monogram upon it in crimson and gold, she took up her pen, and wrote,

## 'DEAR MYRTLE,-

'Though I am so much the eldest, I daresay I am still quite as fond of dolls as you are

yourself. You know how busy all the Circuit ladies are in getting ready for a grand bazaar. I have been working for the same object, and a gentleman has given me an order for a beautiful doll which he promises to buy from my stall. Do you think that you can persuade Mrs. Story to spare you to spend to-morrow with me? If so, I will call for you at eleven o'clock, and we will go together to find this dolly, who I fancy lives in state at the West End. Afterwards I will show you all my own waxen pets.

'With kind regards to Mrs. Story and your brother, and much love to yourself,

'I am affectionately yours,
'Mona Stevington.

'The Rookery, Canonbury.'

When the note was brought to Myrtle the pair were seated at the table preparing their lessons for the next day. It was the first time she had seen her name on an envelope, and when Jane handed it to her, saying, 'A letter for you, Miss Myrtle, and the boy is to wait for an answer,' the child trembled with excitement and gave it to Willie to read aloud.

Mrs. Story willingly gave her consent, and Willie sat down to write the reply.

# 'DEAR MISS STEVINGTON, (so he wrote)

- 'Myrtle will be glad if you will call for her in the morning; she would like to spend the day with you very much. She cannot answer your note herself because she is only in pothooks.
- 'With Mrs. Story's compliments and Myrtle's love,
  - 'Believe me to remain, yours truly,
    'WILLIE SHAXON.'
- 'You will have a lark, I expect,' he said, as he addressed an envelope in his best style, 'I wonder how many of her old dolls have their eyes punched out.'
- 'Not one I should hope,' answered Mrs-Story; then turning to Myrtle, she continued, 'my dear, fetch me your best frock, and let me attend to the tuckers. I think Jane must go round to Mr. Crane's and buy some gloves; she must be sure they are Dent's.'

Myrtle watched the fresh frilling sewn into the neck and sleeves of her black frock, and tried on the soft gloves, which were a great treat, as her guardian generally considered cotton ones quite good enough for her to wear. She felt grateful to Mrs. Story for thinking about such preparations, and wishing her to look so nice.

When Mona drove over the next morning, she found a shy, neat little girl in deep mourning waiting for her. It did not take long for the shyness to disappear as they drove to the West End, where the shop windows were a surprise and delight to the child.

It was better than any fairy tale which she had ever read, to be beside this young lady, who was just like some fairy princess that had changed her glistening robe for warm-tinted velvet and fur. There was still much about Mona that was childish, and she so much enjoyed the whole affair that Myrtle let her own amusement carry her out of herself, and she in her turn became an entertaining companion.

What an age they spent in looking into the windows of the Arcade before they went in to the shop to choose dolly. The saleswoman, who was most obliging, spared no trouble in showing them a most bewildering selection of all kinds and sizes. There were so many, which should they take? After much deliberation their choice fixed upon a small creature because Myrtle thought her so very beautiful. The wax cheeks were moulded into the most natural dimples; the eye-lashes were long and put in so cunningly as almost to excel nature herself; and the fingers and toes were as pretty as pretty could be.

'Madam would require clothing for the doll, whose selection did her taste such credit.' insinuated the saleswoman.

'No, thank you, nothing else to-day,' answered Miss Stevington, and they returned to the carriage taking their new treasure with them.

'We must have something to eat next,' Mona said, before stepping in. 'Drive to a confectioner's in Oxford Street.'

It amused Myrtle to see the crowd of ladies who were in the shop taking refreshment. Mona and she only had sponge cakes and lemonade as they were soon to return

home for dinner. Afterwards they went to a large drapery house, where they bought the materials for dolly's outfit; for she was to have a complete wardrobe. Myrtle begged that her winter costume might be like Mona's, so she laughingly complied with the request, and allowed her to select a length of velvet. As she watched her do so, she wondered whether this animated, happy face which had bloomed out into prettiness, could possibly be the same as that of the pale, dull child who sat beside Mrs. Story on Sundays.

Myrtle's shyness returned during the dinner hour, but afterwards, when Mr. Stevington smoked his pipe, and Mona brought out her work-basket, she lost it while playing with the large family of the latter's old favourites who had been brought downstairs for her inspection. They would have disappointed Willie by their uniform healthiness. No eyes were blinded and their limbs were all sound. Unlike the 'babes in the wood' these fortunate little children had not fallen into the hands of an uncle.

Perhaps the best part of the visit was

after tea when the lights were lit, and the trio amused themselves with picture-books. Mr. Stevington was delighted by Myrtle's powers of observation: little escaped her eye, and he found himself giving explanations of the subjects as he used to do to his own motherless child. As seven o'clock drew near he made preparations for going out.

'Where are you going, daddy?' asked Mona with the freedom of an indulged child.

'To a committee meeting at the vestry. As it is such a cold night, I have half a mind to go down in a hansom, and take Myrtle home, for I pass Mrs. Story's door.'

'That would be nice for her,' said Mona gratefully, and so it was settled, and the child was spared the night walk.

When she reached home, Mrs. Story and Willie wanted to hear all about the day, and she chattered away merrily until Jane hurried her off to bed, where tired and happy she fell asleep and had a beautiful dream.

She dreamt that she was wandering along a dark path beset with endless dangers.

Now a deep pit lay before her stumbling feet, now a great chasm of rocky mountains; but always before she reached the danger a white robed angel gleamed from out the blackness, and lifted her up in tender arms until it was overcome. And each time that the angel set her down upon her feet, she recognised the lovely girlish face of her new found friend; and so in time she forgot to be afraid when a fresh difficulty drew near, because she felt sure she should soon feel the air stirred by white wings, and see the darkness illuminated by those starlike eyes.

The child was combining the ideas suggested by the pictures, and fancy was working its unaccountable spell in sleep.





## CHAPTER VI.

#### CHANGES.

'Pray, how much need you? What! am I a Jew, To put my moneys out at usury?'

OR the next fortnight Myrtle only saw her new friend on Sundays, but at the end of that time she called to ask Mrs. Story if she would spare Myrtle for a week as she felt sure that she would enjoy seeing the doll's outfit made up. So one morning Willie left his sister at Mr. Stevington's house, and she found herself an indulged visitor beneath that pleasant roof. Mona was as busy as possible in the last preparations for the bazaar, and she had a young work-woman staying in the house. This girl was lame, and she sat upstairs all day long beside a bright fire, busily plying her needle.

Mona had provided her with a kettle and tea caddy, so that she could make herself a cup of tea just when she liked without troubling to ask the servants, of whom she stood a trifle in awe. Seeing how the task of dressing the doll would be a relief to her heavier work, Mona considerately handed it over to her, and left it in her hands.

Little Myrtle grew fond of the sickly, lame sempstress, and spent many an hour in the upstairs workroom. She kept a tea-cloth and basin in a secret place, and might have been seen at all kinds of odd times, washing up Mary's little service, tidying the hearth, or picking up the bits from the carpet. She often went into Upper Street, either with Mona or a maid, who had endless trifles to buy; and it came to be an understood thing that she must untie all the parcels that came into the house.

This was the first of many visits. Of course there were interludes in the companionship, for Mr. Stevington and his daughter went away from home more frequently as time rolled on. Still there was always the hope of their return, and the en-

largement of thought arising from the widening interest thus opened out to her. In time Mona forgot that she had once cultivated the intercourse from a disinterested motive: she had grown so attached to her child friend.

Myrtle's delight in the beautiful present more than repaid Mr. Stevington; and Mrs. Story was fairly charmed by his generosity. She now began to understand her charge better, and Myrtle grew more patient with her maturer views, and tried in many little ways to give her pleasure.

As Myrtle passed from childhood into girlhood, any fears which Mrs. Story had once entertained, quite vanished. She became a docile school-girl, who was diligent in her studies and took a fair position in her class.

True, every now and again she had silent fits, when she kept aloof from her school fellows, and at home preferred the quiet of her own room; but no one had any clue to these moods. Myrtle's was a nature that would have been ruined had it been reared entirely in the atmosphere of Mrs. Story's home. The commonplace was sufficient to satisfy that

good woman, and she never reached any other realm.

With Myrtle things were different. Dreamy, poetic, and sensitive to all that was beautiful, the child thirsted for the ideal. It was a happy thing for her that Mona shared something of this nature, though in a more limited degree.

Those fits of passion and of dreaming—those moments of strange mental exaltation, did they not denote some of the subtle fire of genius?

Quite unconscious of possessing anything in her nature that was not known to all by whom she was surrounded, Myrtle gave her warm love to those friends who had saved her life from a terrible monotony of thought and endeavour. Yet with it all she lived much to herself at times. She became attached to certain writers to whose pages she owed some of her happiest hours, and whose influence will abide with her while life lasts.

Mona was not a great reader: she put all her energy and sympathy into the life of every day, and in doing so she bestowed countless charms upon the path of ordinary duty. Her air, her smile, her motion told Of womanly completeness; A music as of household songs Was in her voice of sweetness.

Flowers spring to blossom where she treads
The careful ways of duty;
The hard, stiff lines of life with her
Are flowing curves of beauty.'

Myrtle rejoiced in this sweetness, and it soothed her during her worst moods, though it could not dispel them; for she had to bear them patiently until she approached womanhood, when in a freer life she found to her joy that she had outgrown them.

While, happily, Myrtle failed to fulfil Mrs. Story's dark forebodings, Willie disappointed her hopes. He grew unreliable and idle, and simply would not attend to his education just when he ought to have been doing his best. He was still fearless and always attractive in manner if he chose; and in person he became downright handsome after the bold type of his mother's people. He vexed Mrs. Story by the use of objectionable slang, and he expected his sister to wait upon him hand and foot, which she did both

lovingly and unselfishly at all times; and after she took prizes in subjects in which his ignorance was a disgrace, he insisted on using her brains instead of troubling his own, and on more than one occasion he merely copied out the themes which she had written.

Mrs. Story kept him at school as long as possible in the hope of his doing better before leaving, but at last he merrily ended that part of his career without having won a single certificate or prize.

'I don't go in for that sort of thing,' he observed serenely, when Mrs. Story gave him her opinion on the matter in very plain language. 'It is not in my line. I have not yet found my proper groove: depend upon it that when I do, I shall fit it like a champagne cork fits its bottle. Don't worry over me, you dear soul; remember that care killed the cat, and leave me to look after myself.'

When he entered upon city life in a shipbroker's office his laments were almost tragic at first, though presently he ceased to take them into his confidence, and both Mrs. Story and his sister knew next to nothing of his habits. It was at this time that Myrtle found he was growing extravagant with money. There was a regular supply of pocket money for them both—Willie's of course larger than Myrtle's, because of his age and position.

While Myrtle had hers to herself, she never failed to give birthday presents to those whom she loved, or to find a shilling for any purpose that she thought worth it. Unfortunately Willie began to borrow from this small income, forgetting too often to repay; and in time he made such heavy demands upon it that on more than one occasion Myrtle was for several weeks at a time quite penniless.

She did not bear this meekly, for it put her to inconvenience, and she felt vexed by her brother's conduct. Once at the beginning of the month she refused to lend anything from her new fund. Willie tried all the tones and half-tones between coaxing and scolding, but Myrtle was unshaken in a resolve which she had made of never again depriving herself for the sake of encouraging him in what she felt to be dishonourable. Finding the effort vain, he marched off in great wrath,

declaring that she was selfish and mean, and that she would be sorry for it before long.

Myrtle went out to a music lesson feeling wretchedly out of spirits, and as if she were to blame, though she could not quite see where. When she returned, Willie had gone out, and she ran upstairs to take off her things with the intention of settling down to a busy evening at home.

On her last birthday, Mrs. Story had given her a huge pincushion in pink calico and white muslin, which stood before her looking glass. To this was pinned a sheet of note paper, and on it was written an elaborate I.O.U. in Willie's name. Alarmed and enraged, she rushed to the little cash box, where she kept her money, and from which she seldom removed the key. It was empty!

She checked her anger by the thought that after all it was a joke. The colour came back to her face, and she felt glad that she was alone. Of course it was a joke. Willie would never dare or wish to steal her money.

When she went downstairs Mrs. Story did not notice anything unusual in her appearance, and she did not say anything about the joke. She watched anxiously for Willie's return, but he came in by the back door and escaped to his own room (with a plate of bread and meat) before she knew that he had come in. When Jane made a remark upon it, she again felt roused to anger, and this time she did not try to control her feelings. She ran up to his room, and with no gentle touch knocked at the door.

Willie, who was seated on the bed reading a story, and eating his supper, did not answer.

'If you don't open the door, Willie, I will go off first thing in the morning and expose the whole affair at your office.'

Angered by this unexpected and powerful threat, he turned the key and Myrtle marched in. Every scrap of colour had left her face and she was livid with rage.

- 'Give me my money,' she demanded in a low voice.
- 'I cannot, Myrtle,' said Willie, now quite alarmed by the sight of his sister's passion. 'Sit down, old girl, and let me tell you how it all happened. I am awfully sorry to have vexed you: I never thought you would grudge your help at such a beastly pass as I've come

to now. I only wish I had trusted you sooner.'

There was no mischief about him now; he looked troubled and manly, as he gently pressed her into a seat, and drew up a chair beside her.

It was only too common a story of the folly and lack of principle by which young men allow themselves to drift into debt and difficulty. Amongst other things, he had been hiring a bicycle and letting the debt accumulate until the owner had threatened to claim the money from Mrs. Story. Now as he had used the bicycle for long country rides, he felt that anything would be better than that she should learn the truth about those stolen excursions.

When gliding along some Surrey lane, or beside an Essex thicket, there had seemed an extra charm in their loveliness because of their being forbidden ground, but now things looked very different; and he had borrowed Myrtle's small store to keep the man quiet for at least a few days.

'How much more do you owe him?'
Myrtle asked very gently, for her anger had

melted away before the stronger feeling of despair.

- 'Two pounds fifteen.'
- 'Willie!'
- 'Mind you, it is a rascally shame for him to charge so much. I have not had one half of its value, but I suppose he knows I am up a tree, and he thinks I may as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb.'
  - 'Shall we ever be able to pay him?'
- 'We can do it this week, if you will help me?'
  - 'How?' asked Myrtle.
- 'Well, I have a plan in my head, only it is rather a beastly one at best.'
  - 'You had better let me hear it at any rate.'
- 'My idea is this. I will write the governor by the first mail, and make a clean breast of the whole thing. I've no doubt that he will be furious, and pitch his curried puppy into the face of his native Chinee, but he will be bound to send the money, and clear me out of this hateful muddle-puddle-junction.'
- 'Do you think the man will wait so long?' said Myrtle, who was greatly relieved by Willie's straightforward way of freeing himself.

- 'Not he,' he said scornfully. 'I have told you my part; now you shall hear yours.'
- 'Mine?' exclaimed Myrtle with wide open eyes.
- 'Yes, yours,' he emphasised. 'You know very well what a brick Mr. Stevington is to his golden-haired doll, Miss Mona—mind you, I have not a word to say against her, for I do think—but there, what does it matter what I think, excepting that I must get out of this lodging in Queer Street. Well, we both know that he never refuses her anything, and you must ask her to get him to lend me a few pounds, until I can hear from father: I don't see anything very awful in doing that.'
- 'I would rather do anything than let them think that we suppose we have any claim on their generosity.'
  - 'Mona would do it as easy as winking.'
- 'Well, as I cannot ask her to-night, I will sleep over it;' and with a kiss of reconciliation they parted for the night.

When she reached her own room she sat down to think it all over, and she came to the decision that she would find a way to quiet the man without confiding in Mona. Some instinct warned her not to lower her handsome, boyish brother in the beautiful girl's esteem, for it had flattered her on more than one occasion to see that her friend treated him with a tinge of respect that amused her immensely, because, though he was so much the tallest, she knew that he was more than two years younger than Mona, who of course must look upon him with pretty much the same eyes as herself. Still she did not wish either Mr. Stevington or his daughter to know of this disgraceful conduct; and find a way out of this scrape she would.

Strong in this resolution, she looked roundher room to see what she possessed that would sell for money.

First she counted over her few little trinkets. They were pretty, but she feared they were only worth the merest trifle; still they must all go.

Her walls were hung with a variety of treasures that no dealer would have looked at. Photographs of Millais' well-known pictures, in home-made frames of cork or coloured rice, Scripture mottoes only moderately well painted, hold-alls in crewel-work, and other trifles which

had grown dear to her heart, without being worth their weight in copper. Nothing worth money!

What stands there in the place of honour? The valued and valuable collection of her opening intellectual life.

Very slowly Myrtle walked up to it and looked upon the only wealth that she possessed. This is what she saw. A plain set of deal bookshelves painted with black and relieved in gold. This was Mr. Stevington's last present, and a remarkable one for a girl of fifteen to be able to fill as Myrtle had done.

On the top shelf a pair of Chinese vases (sent by her father) and a clever arrangement of Japanese fans were placed.

Then came a row of lesson books all neatly covered in scarlet American cloth, on which the names were written in clear letters. These covers Mona and Myrtle had contrived during the last Christmas holidays. On the third shelf there was an edition of poets, including Longfellow, Mrs. Hemans, Wordsworth (the least valued, because so little understood), and others. Also *In Memoriam*, by Tennyson, and a complete edition of

Elizabeth Barrett Browning—her first love amongst the poets, as it seems likely to be her last. All these were made firm in the middle of the shelf with a padding of her favourite American stories in paper covers. Below stood Charles Kingsley's novels—the entire set presented by Mona from year to year; John Halifax, Uncle Tom's Cabin, Ministering Children, and The Ministry of Life, The Wide, Wide World, and others less well-known. On the bottom shelf she kept loose numbers and all borrowed books.

At these treasures she gazed in mute anguish. Their beautiful bindings and good reputation would make them acceptable to a second-hand book dealer; with which could she part?

Certainly not with the lesson books, as they would have to be replaced. Several of the poets could now be bought in a new and cheap edition: it would not be worth while to offer those, so she passed on to the next shelf. Must she part with her favourite story of the beautiful West? Never again hold converse with warm-hearted Amyas, or weep over the sadder fate of Frank?

No. She could not spare them, or any of their kindred, whom she loved beyond any of her other imaginary friends: and how could she sacrifice the gentle solace of noble Ursula Marsh's friendship, or the companionship of Ellen Montgomery's lonely childhood, which in some ways seemed so like her own.

She must part with Uncle Tom's Cabin, Ministering Children, The Ministry of Life; not that they were less dear, but because they had been her favourite stories before she could read them for herself, and she had them almost by heart. These, like the trinkets, would be worth so little that she must still find other things; but she was so weary and sick at heart, that she could do nothing more that night; so she undressed, and got into bed.

When she awoke next morning she felt braver, and while dressing she puzzled her brain to find an honourable way out of the difficulty. When she went downstairs, she was surprised to find that Willie had already breakfasted, and was waiting to see her before starting for the office. Directly he caught sight of her, he jumped up and asked her to come out into the hall and give his overcoat a

brush. While she was doing so, he stooped down and gave her pale cheek a kiss.

'What are we going to do, little wise-acre?' he whispered.

'Give me until evening, Willie; I shall know better then.'

'If you don't, everything will come to Dame Fib's ears, and you know what an awful rumpus will follow. I declare I would sooner jump into the Thames and have done with it than be pestered with an old woman's tantrums now that I realise what an ass and a knave I've been.'

'Hush! Willie dear. Don't say such things even in jest; they make me shudder.'

'Do I look like one of her Majesty's jesters?' he retorted, with profound gravity; and with another peculiarly tender kiss, he left her.

As a rule, she left for school directly after he had gone. To-day, however, she lingered about, and in the end asked for permission to stay away for the day.

'My dear!' exclaimed Mrs. Story, who supposed that she had misunderstood her words; so the girl repeated her request.

'Dear, dear. Go back to your room, child, and lie down till I send Jane up with some tea; I saw that you took nothing for breakfast.'

A quarter of an hour later, Jane brought up the promised tea, and to her alarm found Myrtle in a passionate fit of crying.

'Now, Miss Myrtle,' said she, coaxingly, 'don't you go and spoil your beauty with crying. I've no wish to pry, but I do think that you had better give me the chance of helping you and Master Willie out of this last scrape of his.'

Now Myrtle had not once thought of helpfrom such a humble quarter, but she felt that Jane was worthy of confidence. Ever since they had come to live with her mistress she had been kind and forbearing towards Willie's endless mischief and tricks. So she told the whole story, and Jane was not half so much horrified as she had feared.

'Under three pounds—not so much, though it is a nice bit of money, that you

<sup>&#</sup>x27;Are you not well, Myrtle?'

<sup>&#</sup>x27;I don't know,' she answered, with a burst of tears.

need make yourself ill over it. I wish I had known about it last week when I received my wages, because I could have waited a while before spending what I did. One half I always send to poor mother, who is bedridden, and that would have been bound to go, but the other would have been a help; still, Missis would advance me something if we can think of nothing better.'

'Jane,' Myrtle asked solemnly, for she was catching at her last straw, 'do you know anything about second-hand clothes dealers?'

'That I do,' she answered briskly, 'a good deal: have you anything you can part with?'

'I think I could make up a bundle if only I could get rid of it.'

'Leave that part of the business to me. Missis will be wondering what we are about if I stay up here much longer, but she will be going out shopping soon, and then you might look out the things, and when she is having her nap after dinner, we will go through them together, and this evening I will ask to be spared for a couple of hours. I'll warrant that I'll get a fair price for them.'

'Where shall you try to sell them?'

inquired Myrtle, whose spirits were reviving under the influence of Jane's practical sympathy.

'It is queer, but I happen to have a cousin who married into the business. Before I came here, whenever I was out of a place, I used to stay with her, but I'm pretty well settled down at last. I did not care for the business myself, but her husband was a nice man, though awfully ugly on account of the small-pox; and he used to pay away a sight of money over the counter for things not nearly so good as yours will be.'

'Go down, Jane, and I will see what I can find.'

She took the empty cup in her hand, and before closing the door, put back her head into the room, and said in a mysterious whisper,

'I'd give an eye to Master Willie's things. Perhaps there is an old suit that might go; I don't see why he should get off scot free, while you bear all the burden,' and with an encouraging nod she vanished.



## CHAPTER VII.

# JANE'S BARGAIN.

'I am as poor as Job. But not so patient.'

HEN Myrtle heard the front door

close after Mrs. Story she roused herself to carry out Jane's suggestion of looking at her wardrobe. She was surprised to find it so well stocked. Each season her guardian replenished it with suitable things, and as there were no little sisters to finish off some of the frocks which she had outgrown, there were several of them lying by, forgotten alike by herself and Mrs. Story. These she threw on the bed as an encouraging beginning, and then went on with those things which she had in regular wear. The question was which would Mrs. Story be

least likely to miss, for how could she account for the disappearance of her clothes if anything was asked about them. It was a harassing task; but in the end she gathered together all that she dare spare, either from her own wardrobe, or Willie's. These she hid well out of sight, in case Mrs. Story should chance to visit her room: and she then went down into the kitchen, where it was decided that Jane had better ask for the afternoon, so that she could get back soon after tea, and so give Willie the chance of settling with the man that night if it were possible. Story gave her consent to Jane's absence, afterwards remarking to Myrtle that she ought to have mentioned her wish earlier, as in that case Miss Moir would not have been invited to tea, but Myrtle readily promised that the table should be in due order at five o'clock, so nothing more was said on the subject. When they looked over the things together, Jane said there was more than would be needful, so they put back several of the better garments, and they contrived to get the reduced bundle out of the house without its being observed.

What a wretched afternoon that was for the school-girl, who felt as though she was stealing unsuspecting Mrs. Story's goods. course she knew that her father had really paid for them, but she could not banish the idea that she was guilty of a shameful deed. It was a relief to go into the kitchen and arrange the tea tray; she gave her best attention to the tea cakes, which both ladies declared were toasted to a turn. Afterwards she cleared away, and washed up everything that had been used, and then, when nothing else remained to be done, she sat down in front of the kitchen fire to wait until either Willie or Jane came in. While she sat there in the loneliness of a London cellar kitchen her heart felt heavy with anxiety for the future. Her faith in Willie had received a severe shock, for the knowledge of his country rides was a surprise that she sickened to think about. He had violated his father's stern command out of pure wilfulness. What would he say, when he heard this in that far distant land to which his sorrows had driven him? And then a great longing came over her to be freed for once from the shackles of town, and she

asked her heart what it must be like to hear the ripple of a brook, or to stand beneath the rustling leaves of her mother's forest. Old questions with the child, but never so earnest as to-day beside the crackling fire. Willie had shown no tenderness towards the struggles of nature in the few green spots in the neighbourhood: surely he could have waited a year or two longer when he would have had a right to follow his own path. Her endurance had been made easier by the thought that her brother shared in it. Now it had a new bitterness.

The clock ticked on with the peculiar solemnity common to quiet hours in a usually busy place, and it was striking eight when Jane came down the area steps and let herself in. She was glad to see Myrtle there.

- 'It is all right, Miss,' she said in an undertone, 'but I have had a queer time.'
- 'I am so sorry,' replied the relieved sister.

  'Sit down, you good, kind Jane, and tell me all about it.'
  - 'Where is Missis?'
  - 'Upstairs with Miss Moir.'

- 'Then I think I'll get a cup of tea, for I've not seen my cousins, let alone having any of their food.'
- 'Where are the things,' asked Myrtle, with dismay.

'Where you ain't likely to see them again, I'll warrant. Don't trouble, Miss, thank you,' she said, when she saw that Myrtle was busying herself about something to eat, but as she insisted, and Jane was very tired, she consented for once to be waited upon, and divided her attention between the tea, and an account of her own adventures. We give the latter as she gave it to Myrtle.

'You may guess how my heart went pitaa-pat as I crept up those area steps with that
big bundle in my arms. It came over me all
of a sudden that our game would be up, if
Missis had roused from her nap, for you know
what a aggravating way she has of peering
out of that precious front window. Many a
time she's made my flesh creep with spying
at my new bonnet, when I've started out of
a summer's evening, to meet the young man
that I chanced to be walking with. Howsumever, nobody called me back, so I

hurried safe out of sight, and breathed a deal freer when that was over. It took above an hour, what with the bus and the walk at both ends, before I reached the road where Susie lived; but would you believe it, Miss that there shop warn't nowhere to be seen. I felt sure it stood between a confectioner's and a hairdresser's, but all three had disappeared, and I had forgotten the number. up and down I marched, and as I had the bundle in my arms I thought I'd keep from bothering the policeman, as they are an inquisitive lot. I suppose he noticed me, however, for after I had passed him several times, he stopped me, and said all pleasant like, "Well, my dear, are you looking out for your uncle?"

- "Not I," answers I, before thinking what he meant, "it's only my cousin I'm wanting, and I've forgot the number."
- "What trade?" says he, quite polite like.
- "Second-hand clothes dealer," answers I innocently, and I do wish you could have heard him laugh.
  - "Don't poke your fun at me, my lass,"

he said when he had had his laugh out, "was it Willis's you meant?"

- "Yes, sir, that was it."
- "Then you ain't heard that all that row was burnt down a year ago. I don't know what became of the folks as was burnt out; the landlord put up larger shops, and there they are right afore your handsome eyes."
- 'He must have seen that I was put out more than a bit, and had no thought of poking more fun at him, for he turned as grave as his helmet, and with a nod towards my bundle, said,
  - " For sale."
- "Yes," says I, "though they don't belong to me. I want to raise some money for a friend in trouble. Can you tell me of a respectable place?"
- "Come along, then," he says, and on he marched just as if he did not know I had ever been born, till he came to a pawnbroker's, when he held open the door and let me go in.
- "Good-day, Mr. Balls," he said, "I've brought my young woman to do a good stroke of business here. Mind you treat her

well, or else you and I will quarrel," and then he shut the door, and let me drive my own bargain.

'Though I felt uncommonly queer, I made bold, and asked a high figure for each of the things, and when the shopman had beat me down a good deal he pushed three sovereigns and some tickets over the counter, and out I came.

'I declare I was that pleased with our success that I'd clean forgotten the policeman, when up he comes, and says with a wink,

"You have left your bundle behind, I see: did old Balls treat you fair?"

"Yes, thank you, sir. I am sure I am much obliged to you for speaking to him like that; it made him mighty polite."

"Just what I intended. He is bound to be civil when I give him the hint, because we can get his trade into trouble often enough if we act up to our duty. Which way are you going?"

"Into the New North Road."

"Here comes your bus. Don't you trouble your cousin on your own account, my lass, or you won't always walk along so spry in your neat clothes," and he stopped the bus,

and watched it out of sight: and I declare, Miss Myrtle, what with the worry about Master Willie, and the kindness of that man, I'm in a regular flutter.'

'I don't wonder,' answered Myrtle, who was hardly less excited herself. 'What a splendid thing about the money; but still how dreadful to have been driven to get it in that way. What would father or Mona say if they knew?'

'The things were your own, Miss: I think you did right in parting with them to save your brother; and it may teach him a lesson when he learns what he has driv' us to.'

'I do wish he would come in,' said Myrtle anxiously.

'Lor, if it ain't close on nine,' cried Jane, pinning on her cap. 'There goes Missis at the bell: how she do worry if meals ain't up by the tick of the clock. I do wonder what can be keeping Master Willie out so late this night of all nights in the year. P'r'aps he'd hurry himself a trifle if he made sure you had three yeller sovereigns ready to hand over to him as soon as he'd give you the chance—if she aint ringing again!'



## CHAPTER VIII.

#### TROUBLE.

- 'Oh, night of sorrow-oh, black to-morrow.'
- 'Yet despair I feel not: fair seasons yet will come, and hopes as fair.'

TTH the three sovereigns in her purse, Myrtle returned to the sitting room, where she had not been wanted, as Mrs. Story and her

friend had enjoyed a confidential chat. When she went in, Miss Moir said she must hasten home, for she did not know that it had grown so late, and she could not be persuaded to remain to supper.

When Mrs. Story saw that Willie did not come to table, she asked where he was, and was displeased when she learned that he had not been in since morning.

'I don't know what has come to the

youth of our time; in my own it would have been looked upon as a serious offence for a lad to adopt such independent habits. I have written to your father telling how little control I have left over Willie: if he were half a man he would come and keep him in order himself.'

'Do you think there is any likelihood of father coming home?'

'I don't know I'm sure, my dear,' the old lady answered gently, for she was touched by the thrill of anxiety in the sweet young voice. 'I do not wish him to return if he would take you away; but sometimes I fear that you and I are not managing Willie in the best manner. I have been worried in my mind about him lately, for he has hardly seemed like himself—he used to be all sunshine not so very long ago.'

'I do wish he would come in,' said poor Myrtle.

Mrs. Story wished so too, but an hour passed away and they did not hear his step. When Myrtle could bear the silence no longer, she ran down to Jane and asked her what could be done.

'You may depend that he is keeping out of the way till he feels safe from that man; and he will come presently. What a queer caper it is, Miss Myrtle.'

'Do you feel sure that he will return tonight?'

'Bless you, yes. Keep up a good heart before Missis, or she will begin to suspect something more like the truth than he'd care for. He ought to be ashamed of himself to lead us such a dance; but boys and men are all alike, they will set the tune and we may kill ourselves in follering.'

Myrtle could not help laughing as she ran upstairs, and the sound of her laughter banished Mrs. Story's anxiety for the time, though as the night wore on it returned with renewed force. Between eleven and twelve, Jane admitted to her mistress that she had an inkling of a fix which he had fallen into that might possibly keep him away from the neighbourhood of home for the night.

'If that is the case,' said Mrs. Story sternly, 'I see no use in our sitting up. Turn down the gas, and if he comes he can ring us up. I must come to a distinct understanding

with this young gentleman before he again ventures to take such a liberty in my house. He must reform, or cease to make his home with me,' and in deep offence she went to her own room.

For once, Jane did not obey orders, and the two anxious watchers sat up the whole night, listening for the sound of a well-known step which they did not hear. When Mrs. Story came down in the morning, she found them still on the watch, and they were driven to make a full explanation, but she would not allow any extraordinary measures to be taken to lead to his return.

'Leave the boy to himself,' she said relentlessly, 'for what is the good of fighting against nature? Bad blood will out; it is the gipsy taint asserting itself. He will break our hearts as his mother broke the hearts of those who trusted in her long ago. He will come back when it suits him, and not before. Myrtle, you had best forget that you have a brother.'

Myrtle received this in bitter silence, for what use was there in defending him while Mrs. Story was thus angry and unjust; and indeed with her own great trouble weighing her down, she did not care very much about anything else. It was unfortunate that Mr. Stevington and Mona had unexpectedly started for Norway in a friend's steam yacht, on the very day that Jane went to seek her cousin. As the *Erratic* had no settled programme, but was going in and out the lovely fjords as her owner's fancy suggested, they were unable to leave word where letters would find them, and in consequence of this Myrtle could not be strengthened by their sympathy.

As day after day went by, Mrs. Story grew querulous with the ceaseless anxiety; but Jane boldly declared her faith in Willie's ability to take care of himself, and the hope that he would soon come back and be able to clear their minds of all doubt concerning himself.

'There is not anything vicious in a boy because he cares for a bicycle, and it is an easy thing for a young fellow to be entrapped into debt, and led into trouble. You may depend upon it that he is earning the money in some honest way, and when he has done so will return, and keep out of scrapes for the future,' so she said, much to Myrtle's relief.

Meanwhile the man actually presented his bill to Mrs. Story, and went away with the money in his hand.

When Jane learned this, she wanted to go to the pawnbroker's and redeem the goods; but at this suggestion Myrtle was alarmed.

- 'Nothing would induce me to look at them again,' she cried. 'I have a good mind to throw the money into the gutter.'
- 'That you won't,' cried Jane in honest wrath, 'they were good clothes and well worth the money, so it was an honest bargain; and why that money is not as good as any other, I can't see for the life of me.'
  - 'Then I shall give it to a hospital.'
- 'You might do worse, for there are a many sick folks who can't get in because there is not enough room.'
  - 'Jane, your mother is ill, is she not?'
- 'Yes, Miss Myrtle; but she won't want a bed to lie on while I am able to work, please God.'
- 'You said just now that it was an honest bargain.'

- 'And so I say again.'
- 'Then I do wish you would send the money to your mother. You helped me when I thought it would save Willie from trouble; then why not now let me help you, when it would be more useful to you than to me?'
- 'I don't know of any good reason against it, my dear. It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and I won't fly in the face of providence, when it has a notion to help poor mother.'

It was a deep relief to Myrtle when the money was really sent off. It was her first and last attempt to raise money in an irregular way, and it was a strange and improper experience for a girl of her position. When a week had passed away and Willie's disappearance seemed to have happened ages ago, Myrtle's anxiety was partly relieved by a letter which she received, though it was in an unknown hand, and without a signature.

'A friend of Willie Shaxon's fulfils a promise in informing Miss Shaxon that her brother has left England for Australia, on board the *Pandora*. He left in the belief

that it was the best step he could take. In leaving England he had decided to abandon the selfishness of the past few years, and he carried in his heart an earnest purpose of becoming such a brother as his sister shall one day be proud to own. He will write immediately after landing, and meanwhile he commends her to God's care.'

This letter was a puzzle to them all. In her own mind Mrs. Story doubted its truth, but Myrtle never once questioned its veracity. Out of his countless plans, this idea of going to sea was the only one possible to him without money. Besides, he had known a good deal about ships and sailors, and she felt sure at heart that he was away on the high seas, and that the dread of those old fire-light confidences had taken shape, and she was left in her loneliness.

On this we will not dwell. She fell into a poor state of health, and nothing seemed to interest her. Her books were only wearisome; religious services became intolerable; her simple household duties overtaxed her strength, and life held no hope or object worth living for. Jane saw all this and grew troubled, yet could see no way of helping. She watched the girl droop week after week, and strove in her homely way to divert her from her trouble. Unfortunately it had taken too deep root within her heart to be easily forgotten, even for a time; and her silent sorrow gathered weight, and its burden grew more oppressive.

As summer advanced, her weakness frightened Mrs. Story, and in the end she took her to a consulting physician. His advice sounded simple in the extreme. 'Send her into the country, or to the seaside: she needs entire change of air and scene.'

- 'That is quite impossible,' said Mrs. Story. 'Circumstances exist which bind her to London.'
- 'If you had mentioned that sooner, my dear Madam, I could have given you my opinion at once.'
  - 'And that is-' she said with anxiety.
- 'That your ward will not last six months. Good morning;' and he rang the bell for her to be shown out.

Here was an unexpected difficulty for Mrs. Story. She felt bound by the promise

which was given unconditionally; but she had long felt its utter folly, and had written more than once, asking to be released from it, though without success. She consulted Mr. Shaxon's legal adviser. He suggested that she could telegraph to his client, who was then in America for awhile, and tell him the urgency of the case. This she did, but received no answer in consequence of his having left for his post in China.

Once again Jane came to the rescue. It was one day, when Myrtle was lower than ever, that she exclaimed to her mistress, 'Well marm, we are a nice set of fools not to have thought of taking her to Kensington or Greenwich—if they are not different from the New North Road, I'm an Irishman or a bicycle lender.'

Too much impressed by the suggestion itself to mind the way in which it was offered, Mrs. Story set off that very day for Greenwich, where she sought out a lodging. She was fortunate in securing good, clean rooms, towards the middle of Croom's Hill, overlooking the park, and she engaged to take possession on the next day. That evening

she and Jane were busy in preparing for the This they did in good spirits, change. because Myrtle showed a languid interest in the idea which was being so quickly brought into play. From the time they got to Greenwich the invalid began to mend. Miss Moir kindly offered to take care of the house so that Jane could be with her mistress (who was too infirm to have entire charge of her ward), and under her care and devotion, Myrtle almost lived out of doors as her strength increased. At first she could only creep to the pier, where they used to watch the steamers passing to and fro, or the ships being towed down the river.

It was at Greenwich that she received Willie's first letter from Sydney, containing full particulars of his ship, and of much that had happened since he had sailed. It also contained a note for double the amount of the I.O.U. which, he assured her, he had no idea would rouse her to anger, or he would rather have sent the man straight off to Mrs. Story He had played the part of a stowaway, and had not dared to appear until after the pilot had left the vessel. The idea of doing so

came to him when he was actually on board, having been sent from the office on business for the firm, and to his surprise meeting with an old schoolfellow, who was third officer on board the *Pandora*. Willie had confided to him that he was still cooped up in London, which he hated worse than ever; that he was in a web of petty difficulties, and that he would give anything to be sailing down channel and leaving the old life behind him.

To all this the young officer listened kindly, then gave a brief history of how there had been a stowaway on board the old ship in which he had taken his last voyage, with a few hints as to how it was managed; a significant wink, followed by a readily given promise to write to the anxious sister with the assurance of future amendment, and commending her to God's gracious keeping; and then a return to pressing duty without more conversation. The letter was written and posted to the young man's mother to be forwarded in a few days; and in this sudden manner young Shaxon took his fate into his own hands.

At first he had found it rough work under

the captain's displeasure, until his quickness and obedience overcame it. Now, he had won the confidence of all the officers, and he hoped to be engaged for the return voyage of the Pandora, though he had no intention of leaving the sea, for he felt that he was cut out for a sailor. Meanwhile he begged forgiveness for the anxiety he had caused both Mrs. Story and Myrtle, and promised to avoid all evil ways for the future. The letter was so straightforward, and had such a genuine ring about it, that even Mrs. Story relented and restored the handsome runaway to his old place in her affections. Jane said it would have been a queer thing if the captain had not discovered that he was a cut above most stowaways, and for her part, she had no doubt he was on his way to fortune.

Myrtle shed many tears over the letter, for it told on her heart. She felt afraid that her own anger had made it easier for Willie to leave her; and she brooded over every expression of fondness with a sickening longing for the sight of his face, or the sound of his laugh. Still the knowledge of his safety was like a new lease of life to her

just then, and her strength began to come back, though only slowly at first. She used to sit on Greenwich pier and wonder what was the history of those on board the great ships that were outward bound. Sometimes her own yearnings to sail away from the relentless grasp of the city grew almost overpowering; but habit and fate conquered, and in due time they all returned to the monotony of the old life, now grown more sober because it was unrelieved by Willie's merriment or grumbling.

Mr. Stevington and Mona also returned to Canonbury for a while, and the sweet familiar intercourse was renewed and deepened. It was a great disappointment when the doctor ordered Mr. Stevington to winter in the south of France, and Mona grew alarmed at the state of his health; and so they hurried away again, and Myrtle was still left to plod on in the old way. Still the renewal of this friendship had done much to restore the tone of Myrtle's mind, and again she turned to her books for pleasure and profit.

At this time her love and faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ took deeper hold upon her

heart, and made themselves felt in her life. She grew up into a fair Christian character as time passed away, and the love and rest she found in her Saviour banished much of the former loneliness and longing for freedom. She became content to wait God's time at Her old childish ambitions had been crushed in those days of sorrow; for grief and loss had shown themselves plainly to her heart. Early in life she had mastered some of its most severe lessons; and on the threshold of womanhood, she needed something deeper than this world could offer, to awaken her dead ambition or revive the stricken hopes. could not turn to music; for what strain could she awaken so sweet as to drown the echo of the old trouble that yet haunted her dreams? Nor would she yield the powers of her mind to tell in story the hopes and fears, the wreck or salvage of a human life; for what story, however powerful its pages, would convey to another mind one-tenth of the unchanging love or the unspeakable pain which her own little life had contained? Or art, should she turn to that, and find her life task there? Hardly: for she knew nothing of nature, and saw little

around her to awaken that gift within her soul. Yet in these days of quiet living, a new purpose sprang into life, and a holier ambition took root and thrived, for in the silence of her own heart she recognised a distinct call, and formed a definite purpose.

While Myrtle is looking forward to her life work, we will turn back to those scenes where childish lives are experiencing their simpler hopes and fears.





#### CHAPTER IX.

BLUFF.

'A little tiny boy, With hey ho, the wind and the rain.'

within a year of coming of age, a heavy rain fell, and London was at its dreariest. The shopkeepers in the poorer districts blazed up their gas, and tried to attract the poor people, who turned longing eyes towards their dainties. At the junction of Shoreditch and Hackney Road, a potatostall was in high favour, where the salesman cracked his well-used jokes as he got rid of his stock; but for all that, he kept a sharp eye on a small bundle of rags which he had noticed suspiciously near for the last hour. Despite his vigilance, there came an unguarded

moment, during a pause in his sale, which he seized for putting on a fresh supply of charcoal, and when he straightened his back after stooping, he missed two of his best potatoes that were just cooked to a turn. The wet bundle of rags also had vanished.

'That ain't the first time that same young shaver has proved one too many for me,' muttered the man, 'if I do catch him, I'll warrant he will wish he had left them pertaters to burn to cinders afore he'd have made off with um arter that fashion.'

Meanwhile Bluff — for the wet rags answered to that name—had scudded off like a startled rabbit to his hole, where he knew that he was safe. He had taken possession of a case belonging to a furniture house in Curtain Road. It had been thrust away as unsafe for further use, and had been allowed to lie amongst more rubbish until it was beginning to rot. Well beloved of spiders, foul with mildew; this was the best shelter Bluff had yet discovered since he was turned upon the mercy of the streets by the death of his wretched mother. He had tried other places, but as they were also known to older boys, he

was either sworn away or kicked out, and in this retreat he alone felt safe. He had made this his lodging since October, and now it was Night after night the fair-haired, February. blue-eyed Bluff of four, whose chubby beauty would have enriched some childless home with wealth beyond counting, had curled up amongst the mildew and the spiders, and shivered through the night as best as he could. On this night he kept festival. Creeping stealthily past the night watchman, whose steady tramp was his only lullaby, but whose companionship relieved the solitude even while it was his worst danger; he reached his home, and prepared for supper. First of all he wrung the wet out of his curly locks, and rubbed his warm hands over his eyes, while his cold feet clung round the potatoes, whose delicious warmth was such an exquisite sensation to his chilled body. When he had quite recovered breath, he sat on his feet to keep them warm if possible, and then he devoted himself to the event of his life, namely—a meal. How he chuckled in the darkness with joy because of their size as he turned them over and over again. What monsters they were! How nice they smelled!

How crisp the skins were roasted! Mercy how hot to eat! How delicious! Alas! that the treat was so soon over: still they took the edge off his appetite, and cheered by his success in having gained such a supper, Bluff went to sleep.

There are happy children who are soothed to sleep by sweet stories of watchful angels, who guard their pillows from evil dreams, or sight or sign of harm. I wonder whether an angel could have found room for its snowy wings within Bluff's home, or whether it may not be God's gracious purpose to allow us to be the guardian angels to such baby outcasts.

With the dawn Bluff awoke. Be sure he had not listened for the rustle of any angel's wing, or raised a thought higher than breakfast. The question was whether he could get any, and where he had better try? Before moving, he listened to make sure that the watchman was retreating, then very cautiously, he came out and made good his escape. He had just got clear of the premises, when he was surprised to hear the man talking to somebody or something, and he waited to hear what he said. He was talking to a dog.

'What,' said the man, 'poor fellow, you don't like your new quarters, don't you? And you aint eat no supper neither; taint your fancy I suppose.'

The dog, a pure breed of bull-dog, white in colour, rubbed himself against the speaker and barked with delight.

'Come, that is better, old man. It would be a pity for you to pine away; you are too much of a beauty to lose; and there aint many of your breed in these here parts. Brisk up and have a go at them victuals,' but the dog turned away with a growl.

The unseen watcher saw the neglected meat bones, the broken biscuit, the dish of water; and his eyes lit up with excitement. Here was a fortune ready to hand if he could only secure it; a regular supply so that no day need pass in unbroken fast, if he could only find a way of getting to the kennel without being seen. That day the child watched the dog gnaw the bones, crunch the biscuit, and lick up the water which he longed to share, but could not get at without running too great a risk. He tried other dodges to get some food, but without success, and at last tired,

hungry, and almost fainting, he made a desperate venture and put his fortune to the test. His home was at the opposite end of the yard where the bull-dog's kennel had been placed. To-night the stars were shining and there was no friendly cloud to favour his purpose; but he waited this time till the man was near his own den, then slipped over the wall and faced the powerful wide-jawed brute, who was lying peacefully before his kennel. Alert in a second, the dog sprang to his feet and would have barked, had not Bluff boldly thrown his arms round the creature, and by the suddenness of this appeal the barks were stopped. Perhaps the noble brute realised the helplessness of the baby hands that met round his neck, for before Bluff had time to realise his peril, he felt the rough tongue licking his face. and heard the sniff which betokened friendship. Made brave by this treatment, he now faced a new danger in the return of the watchman, and in his extremity he tried his last resource by creeping into a far corner of the kennel. Evidently pleased by this confidence, Bob, the dog, followed, and stretched himself in the doorway; while Bluff, after supping on a fragment of biscuit, went to sleep, more than content with the success of this new venture. It was the beginning of a long friendship.

All through the cold spring, Bluff and Bob shared home and supper. Sometimes the boy brought the dog a rare treat procured by his own cleverness and at the risk of his liberty; and the dog was never vexed to see half of his ownfoodclaimed by the child. Of course during daylight, Bluff kept away, and only ventured near his friend at night. Fortunate was it for the boy that Bob's chief meal was provided when the workmen had cleared off the place, or it might have disappeared before he could have put in his claim for a share.





# CHAPTER X.

### BIRDS OF A FEATHER.

'I think of thee with many fears,
For what may be thy lot in future years.'

LUFF led a happy life while his friendship with Bob lasted, but unfortunately
therecame a day when it was discovered,
and the child was driven from his new
quarters. The watchman was changed, and
the new man, an active, inquisitive fellow,
soon found out the secret understanding
between Bob and the waif, and with unnecessary harshness drove Bluff off the premises,
with threats which effectually prevented his
return.

One July morning at sunrise, when the city buildings were half hid in a mist of yellow amethyst, Bluff again found himself adrift.

Here and there along the streets he saw other homeless wanderers, but none so small as himself: he shunned their company and strolled on until he reached London Bridge. The mist hid the shipping from sight, so he settled himself on one of the stone seats and went to sleep. When he awoke it was broad daylight, and the early toilers were crossing the bridge. After looking about to secure a spot away from a policeman, he held out his hand and begged from the passers-by. Now and again, some warm-hearted mother or generous workman gave him a copper, so he had a merry time as he dropped coin after coin into his pocket, and still trolled out the old story of 'Not a penny to buy a bit of bread for breakfast.'

Having had rare luck, he was going to a coffee stall to get a cup of coffee, with plenty of bread and butter, when he felt a hand laid on his shoulder, and with a sudden sinking of heart he realised that his rare bit of good fortune had already proved a sell, After all, it was not a policeman, but only a big boy who had clutched him in that free way.

'Now then, let go, can't yer,' said Bluff, defiantly.

'I'll let go when I likes, and not before, young shaver. Suppose you and me strikes a bargain. You shall provide breakfast for both, and I'll stand supper. I'm down in my luck this morning, but I'll look spry arter breakfast so as to ensure a rare treat to-night. Is it agreed?'

Bluff felt anything but willing, yet what could he do? The big boy's shrewd face gave no sign of relenting, and he was glad not to be relieved of all his money, so he gave a sulky assent, and the pair hurried off. Bluff felt it a horrible thing to see that hungry lad eat slice after slice of bread and butter, for which he paid, by the pennyworth at a time. He hurried to get a fair share while he had money to pay for it, and they were both quite satisfied before the last penny went in a final cup of coffee, which they shared between them. When they walked away from the stall, the self-invited put his hands on Bluff's shoulders, and looking down into his face, said,

'You have served me a good turn, baby face, and I aint a going back from my word.

We shall both last out till supper time, in case we don't find it jest convenient to dine; but we must meet somewhere to-night. I daresay you know Shoreditch Church?'

- 'Yes,' said Bluff, mournfully, 'I used to live near there once;' for already it seemed a long time since he had been driven from his hiding place in Curtain Road.
- 'All right. You meet me there to-night at eight sharp. It aint so far from my roost either, so it will suit me prime. Where do you live now?'
- 'Nowheres, 'cause I'm turned out. I had got a rare snug place all to myself—at least there were not any other chaps wot called it their home.'
- 'I guessed as you was out of a berth when I clapt eyes on you begging so game like. I'll give you half of my shakedown to-night, and to-morrow we will see if you can't find a way of making a regular living.'

Bluff listened to these offers of friendship quite unmoved, though he promised to be at the church at eight o'clock; and on hearing this, Sam, the stranger, marched off, whistling and gay.

'What whackers he do tell,' and the small boy laughed to himself. 'Catch me a waiting for him—I aint quite such a ass,' and he thought nothing more at that time of the appointment. Presently he went to the Royal Exchange, where the flowerwomen were seated, arranging their baskets for the day, and he begged a button-hole from one of them, who was more tender-hearted than her sisters. It was a poor little rose set round with white pinks, and this a lame gentleman bought for a penny. Back Bluff ran to the woman. 'I say, missis, a daft sort o' lame feller has give me a penny for that flower as you gave me. Sell us two more for it, and I'll drive a regular trade with you maybe.'

'Bless the baby, what a smart little un he is. You be off with these, and mind you don't come bothering round here again in a hurry, or I'll make you sing out in a way you won't fancy.'

Bluff took the flowers, and wandered down Cheapside; but his good fortune was over for that day. Nobody would buy his flowers, and they faded in the heat, till at last he tossed them recklessly into the gutter, and sat down on the broad flight of steps leading to the main entrance of St. Paul's Cathedral, to fret over his ill luck in being driven from dear old Bob. He wondered if he would be glad to have his food all to himself, and whether he would eat up every scrap; till by-and-by, he felt the big tears rolling down his cheeks and a nasty lump rising in his throat. The more he thought of Bob, the worse he felt, for he had nothing else in all the wide world to love, and from this faithful friend he was banished.

Thus the hours passed away. Unnoticed, Bluff indulged his grief, and then looked out upon the crowd with fresh enterprise. All sorts of people passed him on their way into the cathedral, but no one had time, or thought, for a bare-headed child in dirty rags, who did not take the least notice of them. The city men hurried away to their suburban homes, and the sun, with a grand pageantry of colour, prepared to hide his face, as the great clock of St. Paul's struck eight. As he counted the strokes, Bluff was seized with a sudden remorse that he had not given the big boy a chance to keep his word. Even now it might not be too late; so up he jumped, and off he darted down Cheapside, past the Bank, out into Old Broad Street and on into Bishopsgate, where his headlong career was stopped. He felt himself clutched bodily by a policeman, and heard the question,

'Where are you off to, my fine spark, in such a frantic hurry?'

He had no breath with which to answer, so simply gasped on without speaking.

'Hum,' said No. 319, rather disappointed that no one pursued the runaway, 'You travel at a slower rate, or I'll soon have you in the lockup,' and with a hearty shake he let him go.

Quite sobered by this encounter, Bluff went on his way, and hot and tired at last reached the church. Wonder of wonders, there was the boy, and he was beguiling the time by eating cherries out of a paper bag. When Bluff came up, he eyed him coldly, and said,

'So, my fine swell, you aint put yourself out by hurrying, I hope. You must please to excuse it if the sausengers are a trifle overdone. I ordered um brown, and hope they won't be black, that's all; come on, shaver,' and without another word, he led the way through the

back slums into a court not far from New North Road.

Bluff followed him into a house, and up the stairs, with wonder that grew with each step. He had not been inside a house for months, and he was impressed with the dignity of four bare walls. Sam mounted to the very top, then threw open the door of an attic, which was neat and well furnished for that neighbourhood, and in which there was a clean-looking bed. On the table a newspaper was spread in imitation of a cloth, and on it were knives, forks, and plates set for two. Also some bread, butter, and salt, and a pot of jam.

'You look round yer,' said Sam, with a lordly air, 'while I fetch up supper.' And so he did, a supper that made Bluff's blue eyes dance with joy, and the like of which he had never once imagined.

The pot of ale which he shared with Sam made him sleepy, and he was glad to get into bed, and lose all memory of this exciting day in sleep.

When Sam saw that he was fairly off, he went downstairs into the room where his

father lived, and where his mother and sisters were drinking beer.

'Come on, father,' he said, 'and look at my little chap;' so the pair bent over the sleeping child for a minute, and then left him in silence. Outside the door they spoke in whispers.

'Yes, you are right,' said the evil-looking man, who was a regular thief, 'he is a rare innocent looking little cove enough, but he is too much of a baby to be of any use at night work for two years or more. I aint going to provide him with victuals till then.'

'Who wants you to?' replied Sam. 'You see if he and I don't turn out the knowingest pair of pals this side of the Old Bailey.'

'Take care his greenness don't land you on t'other,' and with a laugh at this joke the man went downstairs and Sam went back to his attic.





# CHAPTER XI.

#### CAUGHT.

'Tis my dog that I trust to—
Whose good work, fairly weighed, might outbalance your
own.'

AM saw no reason to regret having offered his friendship to Bluff. The neat bedroom was not the property of Sam or his family; it had belonged to a man who had lived there in solitude, and who at last died unvisited, and apparently unmissed. This strange being had left money and written instructions for his burial, and when all had been carried out according to his wish, the landlord tried to relet the room, but in vain.

Ugly stories were afloat about the dead man, and no one cared to take his place. Sam had no such scruples, and Bluff was positively too ignorant for ghostly fears. By a bold stroke, Sam took possession and secured a companion; and it was weeks before they were turned out by a new lodger.

The boys got on well together. Sam was the master, Bluff the slave; but then such a willing one that he did not even feel his chains. and whatever tenderness nature had bestowed upon the young thief, he gave to his little associate. It is not our intention to follow this pair of juvenile offenders in their course of petty crime and short-lived success. There were times when they feasted, and others when they starved; but the sun never rose on a day when they did not sin. In utter ignorance of right and wrong, they took their dangerous way, until their continued run of success made them careless, and at last placed them within the power of the law. Sam was convicted for petty larceny and sent to prison for three months. Bluff was left to the mercy of Sam's father, and after much suffering decided to run away until his companion's term was expired. He made up his mind to fall back upon the bull-dog's

friendship, for he had not forgotten that faithful creature. He had grown more wary than ever, so he made no attempt to regain his old quarters till after dark, though he ventured near in the daylight, to make sure that the kennel was still there. He peeped through the old chink, and behold, there was Bob sure enough, while beside him stood the watchman who had frightened him away, and a gentleman whom he had never seen before.

'He thrives,' said the stranger, caressing the dog.

'So he do, sir. Leastways at present; but it ain't so very long since he was upset in a queer fashion. He would whine half the night through in the most aggravating way; but the queerest thing was this: however much, or little food was put out for him, he'd sniff at the whole, then divide it in halves, eat one half, and put the t'other inside his kennel so as no one dare touch it; and then he'd whine for an hour at a stretch. We tried giving him less, but it was all the same.

'He moped that dreadful that I did think as he would fret himself to death. After I'd been here some time, he seemed to pick up his spirits again, for you see, sir, I've petted him a deal, and there is nothing his breed like better than being made much of by their friends. Now he will eat everything he can get; he'd take a bite out of us, sir, if we were strangers'—and the man laughed at his own joke.

'I suppose you never saw any other dog with which he could have gone halves? I've heard wonderful things about their friendship for each other sometimes.'

'Never, sir. You see a strange dog would be driv off sharp: though now I come to think on it, I did catch a young varmint of a boy who had hid up in the kennel, but it did not take long to drive him off.'

'Poor little beggar,' said the gentleman.
'he must have been plucky as well as desperate before he risked stealing Bob's food: it was a chance that he was not made into a meal himself.'

Encouraged by what he had overheard, the child returned that night, and received a boisterous welcome from the dog. It was fortunate that the watchman had a favourite corner where he now and then retired for a doze, or Bob's excitement would certainly have spoilt his pleasure. As it happened, he quieted down, and Bluff hid away before the man resumed his watch; and very soon the sagacious animal seemed to understand the whole affair, and again received his guest in delighted silence, and with cunning secrecy. The boy fared badly during Sam's imprison-He feared the police, and fancied ment. they were getting to know him, and he dreaded detection above all things. So he prowled about Covent Garden Market, and got what food he could find amongst the discarded vegetable heaps, and now and again earned a copper by honest means, or secured a meal by robbing some poor cripple who failed to defend her apple stall.

But Bluff did not get on so well as in the days when we first knew him, for his hard life was making him dull, and less 'cute than in the time of his babyish success. For one thing, he was not quite as pretty, and his face was growing more like Sam's in expression, and that wore a look of unmistakable cunning which only too plainly told his character. Bluff counted the hours till Sam's term was

up, and when at last it was over, he was amongst the crowd that had gathered to greet the released prisoners. Impudent, unabashed, and more confirmed in evil than when he entered, Sam pushed his way out through the crowd to where the child stood trembling with excitement.

'Hullo, youngster. .So you have took the trouble to come to look me up.'

'Of course I have, Sam,' answered Bluff, who in his desolation looked up into the criminal's face, and yet could hardly see it, because of the mist of tears which filled his eyes.





# CHAPTER XII.

### THE DAWN OF FREEDOM.

'Never anything can be amiss, When simpleness and duty tender it.'

of her present life, she had always felt a warm sympathy with the miserable class of children who abounded in the neighbourhood of the New North Road. She could never forget an incident that occurred when she was fourteen years old.

Having always lived amongst the poor, and in districts where want was an every day thing, she had no fear of the worst districts that lay around her home. Willie and she prided themselves on knowing the shortest cuts, and also in using them when it was a convenience.

One day Mr. Stevington had brought Mona to Mrs. Story's, and it had been arranged that the two girls should return in the afternoon to Canonbury, where Myrtle was to spend a few days. This happened on a warm summer day, and Mona wore a white muslin dress with white ribbons. Nothing could have been simpler or more suitable for the dainty wearer, but unfortunately on her way home, Myrtle introduced her into byways where such freshness and whiteness were altogether foreign. Myrtle, who wore a suit of serge, might have passed unnoticed as she had often done before, but this white vision called forth remarks, and attracted quite a crowd of ragged children who danced round her, and gave their opinions with youthful frankness.

- 'My!' cried one shrill voiced girl, 'aint she like my sister Juliet when she has her hair dyed all gold, and she's dressed up for her part as fairy queen at the pantomime.'
- 'Where's your kerridge, Miss?" inquired one torment of a boy.
- 'Kerridge,' exclaimed a third, 'you don't suppose she has a kerridge. I'll warrant her

mother is a washerwoman, and she is out for a walk to dry the gownd before it is sent home: and mighty cheeky I calls it.'

Mona bore all this without outward disturbance, merely asking Myrtle to get back to the high road as quickly as possible. they did, but they could not get rid of the children until they hailed a passing cab and drove away from their midst with a decided sense of relief. Mona made light of the annoyance, but Myrtle could not forget the eager faces and unkempt condition of the children, and even at that early age she longed to help them to a better life. This longing had lain fallow in her heart. There were times when it was forgotten but never extinguished; and it seemed crushed out of life during her deep sorrow and depression only to spring up in fresh power when her health was restored, and she began to make plans for her womanhood.

At first her ideas were vague and uncertain, but with time they took a distinct character, and she saw her life-work clearly marked out before her. In spite of its compensations, her childhood had been sad. She

could now understand how much of its common happiness she had missed; yet she learned to be glad of this, because her early heart-loneliness, and longings after mother-love, had prepared her for a part she hoped to take for the rest of her life. The condition of the homeless children who crossed her path every day had struck straight to her heart, and she longed to rescue them from want and early crime.

Could she do anything? So she asked herself time after time, until the impossible seemed possible, and the impracticable the commonplace.

What could she do? She could give herself to the work as an assistant to those who were already striving to keep down the throng of neglected waifs. There was no nearer claim of kindred to whom duty called her. Her father cared too little for his child to wish her to devote herself to his declining years; and, strange to say, Mrs. Story had always implied that their connection would end when Myrtle came of age. She was free, as few girls are free, to devote herself to whatever object she liked; and when she heard

this call within her heart, and felt sure that it was the voice of duty, she rejoiced in the fact of her earthly isolation. We cannot help Myrtle to build her many castles in the air, but we will follow her in the path of lowly, loving service which she trod in obedience to her heavenly guide.

Her object was simply this. To save a few outcast children from the misery of their earthly lot; to train them for a useful life and a holy death; or briefly, to save the children.

With this object in view, Myrtle set herself to learn whatever she thought would be useful in the future life to which she now looked forward. Domestic duties wore a new face, and nothing came amiss to her willing hands. She studied economy with grave care, and delighted Jane by her wish to share in the cooking of the small household. At first this new whim alarmed Mrs. Story, who was at an age when innovations are unwelcome, and she always declined the new dishes which Myrtle valued for their cheapness and nourishment. In the end she was reassured at the girl's intelligence, and her economy made a slight reduction in her weekly expenditure, but she would

not give up any of her prejudices against the very things which so greatly pleased Myrtle, and her follower Jane.

Myrtle spent much of her time at needle-work, and saved up to buy a sewing-machine. She took lessons in dressmaking, cutting out, and making boys' clothing. In fact she served an apprenticeship to all homely and domestic womanly tasks; for she wanted to be ready for her work. Mrs. Story took notice of this change in silence. And truly it was a change to watch the dreamy girl emerge from her books, and long fits of musing, into this lively, active habit of life. One day the old lady could not refrain from saying,

'Mercy on us, what do you want with making boys' breeches? are you thinking of marrying a widower?'

'Not at present, Guardie,' answered Myrtle mirthfully; for in these bright days she had grown more loving to everybody, and sometimes she even petted Mrs. Story. 'Still there is no knowing what one may do; and how useful my husband will find me, supposing I ever have one.'

At this time she was living in the simple

faith and undoubting love of a little child. She had yielded herself once for all as the handmaid of the Man of Sorrows, and the repose of her soul was unshaken. She had not lightly entered into this rest: her child-hood and girlhood bore witness to many doubts and times of disobedience; but now, when she stood on the very threshold of womanhood, she had grasped the hand of strength, and had been blest with unshaken peace in the Son of God.

This was not the result of anything unusual. She had been an intelligent hearer of a faithful ministry; a lover of those beautiful religious poems in which English literature is rich; and above all, she had practised a habit of thoughtfulness. Doubtless she was gifted with high powers, for her nature was susceptible to all that was refined and spiritual.

Was this the dower of her gipsy parentage? Nay, was it not rather the breath of the Holy Spirit? That heavenly influence which the dullest child may seek, and with whose help he may grow into the beauty of a child of God. As surely as Samuel was called of the

Lord, so in her innermost heart did Myrtle feel herself marked out for a certain mission. Without influence, or friends, or money, she yet looked forward to a task which she supposed would need these. Nevertheless she gave herself to prayer, and to the earnest preparation for her work, so that she might be ready when God withdrew the barriers, and gave the command to pass on to the fulfilment of her sacrifice of love.





# CHAPTER XIII.

#### FATHER AND SON.

'It's time my past should set my future free For life's renewed endeavour.'

HILE Myrtle grew up into this

sweet and Christian character beneath the grey shadow of London, Willie attained manhood amid the stirring scenes of a sailor's career. He was far too bold and fearless not to meet with many adventures, and not a few dangers. Indeed his presence on board seemed like a signal for the enemies of his class to do their worst, and the very elements to try their utmost. Fire, storm, shipwreck, with these he met face to face, and from them he came unscathed. Nothing cast him down. Adventure and misfortune only made his

pulse beat more rapidly, and awakened a fresh zest in the dark, mysterious future. His pluck and steadiness of nerve helped him to success; and he rose year by year in the confidence of his captain, who was glad to retain his services as chief mate after he had passed his final examination as master mariner. His early difficulties and wrong-doings had been, to some extent at least, the result of the unhealthily narrow life to which his father had unwisely condemned him. With a more manly life he had outgrown those youthful follies, and was perhaps the better for them. They had driven him to meannesses of which in his better hours he felt heartily ashamed, and they had opened his eyes to his own weakness, and to the depths into which he might sink unless a higher power came to his help. Thus in a different way, Willie also was attracted by the power of religion; he became a God-fearing man, and the broad current of his life flowed to the true haven.

Once in the course of his wanderings, he touched a port within reach of the place where his father lived, and William Shaxon took the journey to see his son, who was unable to get leave from the ship. In spite of all the past, the meeting was full of affection on both sides; and it awoke a strong parental longing in the self-banished Englishman to return, and spend the rest of his days with his only daughter in the land of his birth. This desire grew upon him, and he had made up his mind to do so, when he was smitten down by sudden illness, and died within a year of the interview with his son.

When the news reached England, Willie had just sailed for a long voyage to the East, and Myrtle was the only child concerned in the will, as her brother had forfeited his share by disobeying the one condition imposed upon them both alike. When she came of age, Myrtle found herself in possession of a modest fortune, without taking a penny of what her father had intended for Willie: and this she refused to add to her own portion.

Mrs. Story was surprised when she heard what there was for her ward, as she had supposed William Shaxon to be in very moderate circumstances; but it seemed that his lawyer had been empowered to invest the yearly interest arising from the property as he thought best, and as he had done so with judgment, Myrtle was placed in a good position. Thus the last needful thing was bestowed for the beginning of her work, and with a thankful heart she recognised that the gift was from God.





# CHAPTER XIV.

#### THE TIME AND THE PLACE.

'How little our real life is chronicled by external events; How much we live a second and higher life in our meditations and our dreams.'

the town of Epping still lives its simple, monotonous life untroubled by the excitements which convulse the great city from time to time. Cut off from the suffering East End by the forest, the rural population lead their lowly lives much the same as their forefathers did before them. Many of them live in the same timeworn cottages, and work under masters who are called by the old names. Here and there a speculating builder has run up a row of small artisan dwellings, but as a rule the

poor folks still cling to their old homes and former habits of life, just as though they appreciated the artistic beauty of the tree-embowered, ivy-clad retreats which give such effective relief to the wild landscape.

Half a mile out of the town (little better than a village, except in name), there stands a group of such dwellings as I have mentioned; old, picturesque, and hid away beneath a lavish growth of ivy. They differ in size considerably, one has only two rooms while another has seven, and gables and chimneys rise in fantastic combination. has its long garden in which homely things thrive, and beyond the thick hedges the pasture lands surrounding a substantial farmhouse undulate and swell until they are lost in the woods that crown the hill where it meets the horizon. Altogether there are eight cottages and the farm, and all these bear indiscriminately the name of 'Ivy Chimneys.'

Fifty years ago, this small estate belonged to a man named Wharburton, who left it to his wife unconditionally. She lived there in her old age in solitude, having mourned the loss of three sons. Mrs. Wharburton willed it to her sister's only child, a wanderer called Shaxon. It was while here that he brought home his gipsy wife to one of the cottages, as he had succeeded in letting the farm to a good tenant. And now his tenure was over, and to Myrtle, their daughter, the property had descended, while Willie's fortune was invested in a more speculative way.

What strange freak of fancy had made the late owner still keep the estate instead of selling it, Mrs. Story for one could never understand; and as to leaving it to the girl, after his unkind restriction, why she called it rank folly. And so the lawyer thought, only he did not say so. Of course Mr. Mills knew the story of Myrtle's childhood, and he was curious to observe what effect her training would have in after life. He first saw her in connection with the will of his late client, and he was struck by the calm strength in her clear eyes, and the gentle selfpossession which she showed. She was dressed in very simple mourning, and though her face was pale as of one who had lived too much in town, still there was a delicacy of feature and sweetness of expression that charmed the lawyer's critical eye.

When they had parted he could not keep back a smile as he said to himself, 'That pretty little madam has a will of her own, I'll be bound. I wonder what she means to be up to: not marry a gipsy I hope.'

As for Myrtle she also smiled when all the business formalities were ended and she felt herself to be the mistress of her own fate. She smiled until lips and eyes vied with one another in that expression of gladness. How delightful it was that summer had not yet passed away. That evening in the quiet of her own room, while the sunset hues softened the harsh lines of the surrounding buildings and gave a touch of beauty even to that realm of bricks and mortar, she sat down to think.

Free! no longer chained to the city, but free to wander away to 'green pastures and beside the still waters.' Free to wander to those leafy shades where the birds sing their sweetest songs, and the flowers fill the air with their fragrance.

Thoughts of all lovely things visited her in that hour. She seemed to hear the rythmic

voice of nature whispering its choicest secrets into her ear and to feel the scales falling from her eyes. She heard the beat of the crow's dark wing, and the full-toned hum of the bee, till sound blended with sight, and she saw a troop of little children with pale, tired faces who stood upon the margin of a green land, as if their feet lacked the nimbleness to advance. 'Come, children, come,' she cried, and then they were changed into the full perfection of healthy, happy childhood, and they clapped their hands with glee, and she heard the tinkling of their dancing feet upon the grass.

Suddenly she was roused by the sound of Jane's voice, saying, 'Well, I never; who would have thought of catching you asleep before supper. You are to please come down, Miss Myrtle, for Missis is waiting for you, and supper is on the table.'

She found Mrs. Story in one of her most chatty humours, and very thankful that *one* of her wards had at least done credit to her training.

'Eh! my dear, she said, as she resumed her knitting when the cloth was put away, 'just to think that you are really grown up, and your own mistress into the bargain. Mr. Mills has been clever to fill your purse so comfortably: your income will be much better than mine.'

'I am glad of that, because my expenses will be heavier.'

'Child!'

'I mean that I shall have more mouths to feed, and little bodies to clothe. Ah! you do not know what I am talking about. Dear Mrs. Story, let me tell you what I hope to do with my life.' And there, in the summer night, Myrtle gave a full explanation of the hopes she had formed of doing some good in the world.

Her guardian listened in amazement. She had lived most of her life where want and ignorance abounded, but had not done anything special to lessen the one, or enlighten the other. She was a good woman, and when brought face to face with a scheme like Myrtle's, she positively dared not oppose it, though at first it seemed to her a very foolish thing to attempt.

'You will be imposed on, and robbed right and left. You little know what a diffi-

cult thing you have set yourself: you had far better wait till Willie comes home, and then take his advice. Dear, dear; you Shaxons are the most difficult set of folks to deal with that ever came into this world.'

- 'Of course I cannot do anything until I have seen my own landed property,' Myrtle said merrily.
- 'I hope you don't mean to begin gadding about yet a while.'
- 'Is that an unreasonable wish after waiting twenty-one years to begin? Guardie, I mean to go into Essex to-morrow.'
- 'Mercy on us, child. I am surprised at your thinking of wasting your money after that fashion.'
- 'And I should like to take Mary Burns with me for company,' continued Myrtle, with sweet audacity.
- 'Surely you don't mean Miss Stevington's lame sewing girl?'
- 'She is less lame than she was, and it would be such a treat for her to have a day's real holiday. If you don't mind the walk, we have time to go round now. It is only half past nine: may I fetch your bonnet?'

'Fetch a broomstick, I should think you mean. There, go along, for it's evident that you mean us to behave like a pair of Lancashire witches.'

Mary's rooms were close at hand, and they found her still busy at work. Her face lit up with pleasure when she heard what Myrtle wanted, and after a little kind persuasion, she promised to be ready by nine o'clock the next morning.

'Not unless it is a fine day, Mary—I must have the sun in attendance on my first visit to the country,' said Myrtle, as they were leaving the lonely workwoman in a flutter of pleasure and excitement.

When her visitors had gone, Mary went down to her landlady in the kitchen, and there told her the news.

'Now did you ever?' cried Mrs Gill.
'Well, I do call that kind. What are you going to wear? You are kindly welcome to my scarlet shawl if you would fancy a bit o' colour to set you off for a holiday. Folks do dress up mighty fine for a day in Epping Forest. I knew one of my lodgers pawn a good feather bed a purpose to go there tricked

out quite fine, and she got upset on the lake, and had nothing to show for that best bed as you may say. Don't you let your young lady persuade you to try too many turns on the roundabouts, they make a body that sick—but there, my dear, you must enjoy yourselves in your own way; though for my part I don't set much store on the Forest, if I don't provide a nice bottle of extra "Old Tom." There is a deal to think of before you go a pleasuring.'

Promising not to indulge either in boatswings or roundabouts; and declining the scarlet shawl with thanks, Mary went upstairs to get out her neat Sunday clothing ready for the next day. She never remembered a whole day in the country. The gala days of her life had been those which she had spent in Miss Stevington's work-room, sewing for that kind young lady, and her most delicate task had been to dress the doll for Myrtle. How strange it was that the pale little girl had grown up into such a lady—not beautiful like Miss Stevington of course, but with gentle ways peculiar to herself; for even Mary saw the quiet strength that had come to Myrtle since she had embraced the purpose of her life.

After folding away her work, just as though it were Saturday night, Mary went to bed, and happily for herself, soon fell asleep; but Myrtle heard a neighbouring clock strike the hours which carried her on towards the day when at last she hoped to gaze upon that dreamland of her earlier years—the country.





#### CHAPTER XV.

#### AFTER LONG EXPECTATION.

'Beneath the trees I sat
Among the flowers, and with the flowers I played;
A temper known to those who, after long
And weary expectation, have been blessed
With sudden happiness beyond all hope.'

about that the moment she woke up; and Myrtle also when Jane called her, for she had fallen asleep towards the dawn, and Mrs. Story began to be afraid she would be late for the train unless she was hurried. While they took breakfast, Jane packed a small basket with sandwiches and fruit; and by the time Myrtle was ready, she had put this in the cab, and nothing remained but to pick up Mary and proceed to the station. As she was waiting at the open door, they

lost no time, and found themselves at least half an hour too early at Liverpool Street. This, however, they did not mind, for they found seats, and amused themselves by watching the crowds of business men who arrived by the frequent trains, until it was time for them to take their places in a railway carriage that quickly filled with evident pleasure seekers.

As they passed Bethnal Green, and the like neighbourhoods, Myrtle's heart ached with its old sympathy and longing. After all what could she do at best to relieve the privation and misery that frowned down upon her as she glided by on the merciful lines, beyond the reproach of such sights.

Mary knew nothing of these emotions. She had lived in contentment, thankful when she earned enough to pay her way, and patient in want. Now she took a lively interest in her fellow passengers, without troubling about the hard fate of those who were left behind to work on.

Presently the carriage emptied; and still the pair travelled on to a quiet station where they were told to change. Myrtle saw Mary seated, and then she paced the quiet platform alone. How silent it was; surely it was nature's day of rest, for a strange Sunday feeling fell upon her heart. But no, it could hardly be, for she could see the late hay-makers at work, and in a harvest field, the men were busy with their scythes. From some gardens close by, the scent of flowers pervaded the air, and the birds were singing in hedge and thicket.

In the silence of profound contentment, Myrtle and her friend travelled to their journey's end. They found Epping a rustic station, set in the lap of a lovely stretch of country, and were fortunate in securing an In this they drove to Ivy empty fly. Chimneys, which they found was close to a picturesque hamlet called Oak Circle. Here they dismissed the fly, and sat down beneath a great elm to refresh themselves with the contents of Jane's basket. Afterwards Myrtle walked about by herself, and to her great joy she discovered that the big cottage was untenanted, so she climbed the hill to the farm, and asked for the key, so that she could go over it.

The mistress was a comely person, and she made herself very agreeable, though she had no idea that she was doing so to her own landlady. Indeed, she afterwards spoke of her visitor 'as a pale slip of a girl, who looked a deal feared o' the cows in the yard.' With the big key in her hand, Myrtle hurried back to Mary, who was delighted to have the chance of looking over the cottage. It was the very place, Myrtle declared, for her start in life.

- 'O Mary!' she cried, 'which room do you suppose Willie was born in? Would it be in this, where the ivy has crept through the casement?'
- 'Don't you think it would be here where the roses grow so thick round the window, Miss Myrtle?'

What a wonderful and delightful time they had, to be sure. They fixed upon one room that must take four little beds, and another that must hold two though it was such a mite.

'You see, Mary, if I was a poor woman with only six children, I should think I had a lovely house if this were mine. I shall have

to take that queer little porch room for myself—but then what a view I shall have. Depend upon it, we shall manage splendidly until we can spread out into some of the other cottages as well.'

When Myrtle had planned the place out to her full satisfaction, they sought *The Acorn Inn*, and asked if the landlady could give them some tea. This she did in a satisfactory way, and both girls felt much revived by a comfortable meal. By this time the heat of the day was over, so they decided to saunter back to the station by the field path, and they were in nice time for the train by which Mrs. Story had made Myrtle promise to return.

What a wonderful change that meditative hour in the train wrought. They stepped into the carriage where the fragrant roses wafted their sweet farewell. They got out where noise and hurry strive their utmost to confuse those who venture amongst them. As the cab rattled on towards home, both Myrtle and Mary began to wonder whether after all that quiet day in the country had been anything but a dream, till they were both assured of its reality by the basketful of treasures

which they had gathered from the hedgerows and the neglected cottage garden.

This visit of exploration was followed by an unsettled time for Myrtle. First of all, Mr. Mills had to make some necessary arrangements before she could take possession of the cottage, which she declared to be the very place for starting her scheme. Then she herself set the sanitary inspector to work, and by his advice considerable improvements were made; and these caused some delay. Then the paperers and whitewashers took possession, and at last, when their work was finished, Myrtle had the pleasure of furnishing her new home.

This she did with severe economy. Every thing was plain and good; but she resisted all temptations to luxury, by remembering that while doing so, she kept the power of saving an extra life from the homelessness of the streets. She furnished the little room over the porch in the same way as all the others, though at the last it quite changed its character, because of the addition it gained by the trifles Myrtle brought from her old room at Mrs. Story's. That lady had overcome all

her objections, and had entered into her ward's preparations with zeal and generous sympathy. Her advice was practical and wise. Myrtle sought her help in choosing the furniture; and it was a rare sight to see the old lady weighing the merits of house linen, and choosing out warm blankets.

There were many things that Myrtle would have overlooked, but nothing escaped Mrs. Story, and her help was invaluable. restrained the girl's impatience; and helped her to form the simple rules for the new household: and at the last, she made a great sacrifice in offering to lend Jane for a few weeks until things were fairly started at Ivy Chimneys. This was a great pleasure both to Myrtle and Jane; the latter was pleased to think of cooking plenty of good food for the suffering little folks, and Myrtle felt quite sure of success with her old friend at the head of the kitchen department. Mary was already installed as sewing maid at the cottage, and Myrtle felt equal to the rest in her own active, loving person. She meant to frame the final rules from the result of her present experience. Their life would develop from day to day.

until she had learnt something of the characters and habits of her children; who as yet were still homeless in London. Just at first, she only aimed to feed, clothe, and make a real home for six little ones; who, without her help, would have struggled through the approaching winter as utterly neglected as though her Master had never uttered His wonderful 'Inasmuch,' which lights a halo round the brow of every poor little outcast. When all was complete at the cottage, she gave the finishing touch by hanging coloured prints of Scripture subjects in each of the rooms. They set them off wonderfully, and she hoped they would be attractive illustrations of those teachings which she longed to impart.

Myrtle had taken few people into her confidence: she wanted to feel her way before she talked about her work; so excepting those who saw her preparations, few knew anything about it; and she bade good-bye to her old home and started on her new career in the most unobtrusive way. Mrs. Story missed her sadly, though with the philosophy of age, she tried to make the best of her empty house, and never failed to give Myrtle a loving

welcome whenever she came to town; and Myrtle, mindful of all her former kindness, often came back on purpose to cheer her guardian in her lonely—though far from unhappy—old age; and once a year at least, Mrs. Story left her silent hearth, and spent some weeks as an honoured guest amongst the busy, merry life at Ivy Chimneys.





# CHAPTER XVI

# BLUFF'S CHANCE.

'An erring wanderer's way is ourse'

HINGS did not run so smoothly between Sam and Bluff after the former's imprisonment, as before. For one thing Bluff dared not venture near Sam's father, who claimed much of his son's time and help; and so he was left a good deal to his own devices; and even when he was with his old associate, he came in for a fair share of abuse and rough treatment, for quite unconsciously Sam had taken his father for his model of manliness, and the result was unfortunate for Bluff. It chanced that Sam met with an accident that kept him indoors for more than a month, soon after the time when Myrtle began her country life; and for

amusement he began to scribble odd pages about himself and his own doings as he had known a curious character do in jail, and as they bear upon our story, we will take the liberty of copying from them.

\* \* \* \* \*

'I reckon,' so wrote Sam, 'that there ain't so many chaps wot don't know London as there is as don't know the country. Anyhow Bluff and me know London pretty well from end to end, but it is precious little of the country that we know: leastways I don't, and until lately Bluff did not neither. Bluff is a rare pretty little fellow, and a regular knowing one too, considering that he ain't quite six years old. His face is like a baby's, in a perambulator, as is fat and round and chubby: and his hair is that light and yellow that it keeps its colour in spite of the dirt, especially as he is fond of a dip in the canal sometimes in warm weather. I've been proud of Bluff, I have, 'cause he took so handy to the dodges as I set him up to, and if he had not been collared and took away by that young woman, as said as how she would help him to grow up into a respectable man, he might have

turned out a cleverer one nor my dad, who makes a good thing by going on the prig.

'This is how Bluff and I came to part. One chilly morning we was early astir in search of some breakfast (for we had had a run of ill luck), and he marched into an oilshop that was being swept out, and standing on tip-toe before the counter, says boldly,

"Please, sir, I came in for a pound of soap, and I put down sixpence on the counter, and forgot to take up the change."

"O you did, did you?" says the man behind the counter; "you'll bring back the soap, and then perhaps I'll give you the change."

" Mother's got it in the wash tub, making a lather."

"Come, young shaver, you be off sharp before I set the bobby after you," says the shopman, riled like, and then he turned round quite smooth and polite to a young lady who had come in to buy a bottle of ketchup.

'Bluff came out to me shaking his head as much as to say "No go," and we listened to 'em talking.

"Was that baby trying to cheat," the lady

asked, with her great eyes looking kind o'shocked.

"To be sure, Miss Shaxon," says the oilman easily, "there are are lots of them who try it on: they begin to thieve and cheat in their very cradles, I do believe."

"I am afraid they don't often have them," she says in a soft, low-voiced way, and then she came out to us.

"Boys," she says, "I want to talk to you. Shall we buy some buns, and then go and eat them in the churchyard?"

'Bluff and me was always ready for anything that turned up, so we both cried, "Yes, marm," and trotted after her to a baker's. Lor! my eye, what a bag of buns she did buy and give 'um to me to carry till we came to Saint Mark's churchyard, where we all sat down on a seat opposite a flower bed; for it is one of them rum places where they have chucked away the grave-stones and made into a flower garden. Mind you, if I were one of them there corpses, I'd a deal rather have my own respectable stone than a lot of flowers. You can have them when you are alive if you have a mind to, but you have to

wait until you are dead before they treat you to a stone, which is a some at as tells folks you came to a natural end instead of being hurried into nothing with quick-lime: only that ain't here or there. So there we sat and pitched into the buns. She kept one for herself and give most of it away to a hungry dog that came sniffing round, and then after a bit she said to Bluff,

- "Little Yellow hair, do you know anything about the Lord Jesus Christ?"
- "' Nothing that I knows on," said he, looking at her very hard.
- "Do you?" she asked, turning to me and speaking so very low I could only jest catch wot she said.
- "Lots," I said sharp like, for I was afraid she would find out that I had been taught in the prison, and that ain't no business of hern that I'm aware on. That shut her up for a time, but presently she began again, and asked whether Bluff had any parents, and he answered her all pat.
- "No, Missis," says he very calm like, "I ain't. Mother were a bad lot as drunk herself to death before last winter began, and as for

father, I don't recollect hearing aught about him, but I reckon as he is dead too."

- "Poor child, how have you lived if you have not had anyone to take care of you?"
- 'Bluff looked up at her and laughed right out.
- "I have had Sam and Bob," he said, giving me a friendly nod.
  - " Are you Sam?"
  - " Yes, lady, that is my name."
- " Now listen to me, Sam and Yellow hair, for I shall give you an invitation after I have told you something about myself. like you boys, am a Londoner, and until lately I had never once seen the country, and had hardly a true idea about it. Now I live there. I have such a nice house with a pretty garden all round it, and it is fresh, and sweet, and clean. It is just as snug as snug can be." "Like Bob's kennel, I'll bet," I heard Bluff whisper to himself, but I gave him a wink to keep quiet, for I rather liked her style of talk. "My house is too big for me alone, so I want to get some boys to come and live with me, and help to pass the winter that will soon be here, in a right merry, warm

way; so boys, I'll give you the first invitation: will you come and live with me at Epping?"

- "What will you give us, Miss?" I asked, for there are queer dodges about, and I thought this might be one of 'em.
- "Plenty of nice food, neat clothes, a healthy home, and enough work to keep you happy."
- "Will there be any rules, Miss?" I asked, for it certainly did sound downright jolly, something like a soup kitchen where the soup was always on the boil.
- "Yes, there will be a few simple rules for us all to follow: I could not make you happy without them."
- "I'm much obliged to you, Miss, all the same, only you don't catch me following no rules to please nobody. I ain't going into no such trap; give me my liberty, says I, and I'll take care of myself. Bluff, here, can do as he likes."
- "Bluff," says the lady very earnest, and looking so nice, somehow, I almost changed my mind about those there beastly rules, "will you not come and live in my pretty home? There will be nice pudding every day,

and you shall have such a sweet little bed for your own, with just as many blankets as you like. Then you may keep a dog or a cat, or any live pet you like for a companion; and besides, there will be other children for you to play with. As well as all this, little Bluff, I would teach you about the dear Lord Jesus, and you would be so happy in learning to be like Him."

- "Look here, Miss," says Bluff with his forehead puckered all up with solemnity, "would there be muffins and *lots*—mind you *lots*—of hot baked potatoes, 'cause if there would, I'll go along with yer most willing."
- "Yes, dear, you shall have plenty of muffins and hot potatoes, too. It is a promise."
- "Then I'm going, Sam. Why don't you come too?"
- "Rules," I says, "I know em; and I won't go near 'em; so that is flat. You know where to find me when you are as sick of them as I am. What, you are off already, are you?" for he had took her hand, and after he had whispered to me to give an eye to Bob, and to beg me to follow him into the country; before

I could pull myself together, he was off. started up to call him back, but something seemed to say to me, "Don't. Let the little un have a chance of growing up respectable. Let him go and follow the rules that turns him into a scholar, and wot makes him turn his back upon your ways. Just think if he ever came to wear a tall hat and a black coat. and to live in one o' them streets where a milk cart drives round regular, and the clothes is sent out to be washed," so I only watched them into a house where an old lady lived who was sitting by the window, reading a newspaper; and where I knew I could trace him if I wanted. Then I went home, and told father, who said, "Leave the boy to his luck; he has cost you a deal since you picked him out of the gutter. You would do far better to try your hand with me, for you are too big for the other game now."

'Somehow it feels lonely without the little chap, and it is rum how one of the parson's texts keeps running in my head, "There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." I suppose it is all along o' that young lady speaking about Jesus; and me being boxed

up here with a broken rib. After all, He must have cared more than a bit about a chap to go and die for him. Next time the Salvation Army comes hollering along, I'll have a try to make out what they says about Him—but I'm a bad lot, and so is father; there is precious little chance for the likes of us.'





## CHAPTER XVII.

#### 'THE MUFFIN MAN.'

'Where patient toil of teaching, And kindly deeds abound.'

HE days sped merrily by in Myrtle's home, when once she had secured its little inmates. Mary and Jane could have told some amusing stories of what passed in a certain bath-room, where the strangers spent their first half-hour at Ivy Chimneys. Suffice it to say, that during that magic time, the rags and dirt disappeared, and when the children were given over to Myrtle's care, they hardly knew themselves in the new clothing which she had provided for them. Before winter had quite set in, Myrtle and her children had fairly learned the secrets of the country side; for they were to

be seen in wood and dale, on common, or among the thickets of the forest. Everything bore the charm of novelty, and it seemed as if they would never tire of the invigorating air, and the varied charms of a rural life.

Bluff, from the very first hour, devoted himself to Myrtle with a winning persistence, and showed a quick perception for all the sights and conditions of his new life. It was Bluff who first found out a sandy circle in the shades of a great wood, where the rabbits frisked in merry gambol. Here, too, one day when the party were hurrying down a winding path, fringed with amber bracken, he hushed their chatter and pointed to where a fox slunk unsuspectingly along. It was Bluff who found where a pair of ringdoves had built their nest within sight of his bedroom window, and who led the admiration of all the children to countless country sights and sounds.

In the midst of her happy children, who so glad and merry as their elder sister? for from the very first, Myrtle took that name and position for her own. To the boys and girls to whom she filled the post of provider

and ruler, she was simply 'Myrtle.' She wished to control through love alone; and her maids were obliged to confess that her success was marvellous. Repeatedly when they had found the children unmanageable, Myrtle, without an effort, seemed to banish evil tempers and to subdue former habits in a firm, loving way, peculiar to herself. While the weather was fine, she was chief leader in the rambles and out-door life; and when rain set in, or a thick mist veiled the landscape, she opened the lesson books and set the children their tasks. As time went on, each child took his or her share of household work; and the little hands proved themselves capable of doing much both with pleasure and profit. The dullest boy showed a perfect talent for cleaning the stoves, keeping the coal boxes filled, and the fires in good condition; so he won the name of 'Stoker,' and it became his daily task to attend to this department, and his pride in it grew as time went by. The little girls made the beds, and dusted the rooms; and each and all of the children enjoyed doing their part to help 'sister' keep the home in order. It took Bluff some time

to get used to his beautiful little flannel shirts and all the rest of his warm, strong clothing. At first it puzzled him sorely to remember in what order to put it on. Myrtle used generally to stay at home on Sunday evenings, and put her children to bed. She liked the confidential talks, and the special warmness of heart that characterised the little ones at such a time; and they would keep her by their bedsides until Mary and the other maids came back.

By Christmas everything was in working order; and Myrtle, with a feeling of profound thankfulness, was assured that her effort would prove successful. Already her children were healthy and happy, and under good control. Her expenses were very moderate; not so heavy as she had anticipated, for she found it practicable to train the children to take their own share in every department of work, so that with double their number, she believed that she would still only need Mary as a sewing maid; a good, motherly woman as head in the kitchen; and another helper in the house and for the laundry.

By-and-by she might have to engage a

teacher, but to begin with, she could manage that work herself.

One afternoon in the depth of winter the children were thrown into great excitement about four o'clock, by an unusual sound in the garden. Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle, went a bell.

'What is that?' asked Myrtle from her low chair by the hearth, where she was seated, telling the children a story by the firelight.

'I daresay that it is one of the cows from the farm. I notice they often stray away,' said Stoker, calmly.

'I hope it is not coming over my potatoe bed,' cried Bluff with excitement. 'I say, Myrtle, just wait a bit, while I go and drive the creature out,' and away he darted. Bluff quickly turned the handle of the front door, but he did not cross the step, for to his surprise, he saw a boy standing there with a muffin tray upon his head. 'Wait a minute,' cried the child, 'I'll ask sister if we may not have some. 'Myrtle,'—he was again beside her chair—'there is a real London muffin man at the door; it was his bell we heard. May we buy some muffins for tea?'

Now in that quiet spot, seldom visited by anything more exciting than a few stray sheep or a flight of rooks, any visitor was a surprise, then how much more such an unusual one as an enterprising muffin man. Myrtle went to the door, and by this time Mary was busy lighting the hall-lamp, and all the children had followed Myrtle to watch her drive her bargain while the man still stood out in the darkness.

- 'I say,' said Bluff with some of his old audacity, 'I wish you would give your bell a good ring—it sounds so jolly, and makes me think of where I came from. Make a regular row.'
- 'Do, do,' cried the rest of the children in a breath.
- 'You ridiculous Bluff,' laughed Myrtle, counting out some coppers.

Down went the tray, and back retreated the little group as the muffin man caught hold of Bluff and turned him round to the light. 'If it ain't the youngster!'

'Is it really you, Sam?' cried the child, trembling with delight. 'O dear, dear old Sam, have you come on purpose to find me

- out? And O, what a little muffin man you are, after all.'
- 'Is it really your old friend, Bluff?' interposed Myrtle with her pretty air of authority.
- 'It is indeed,' said the boy, with tears in his eyes.
- Then give him this shilling for some muffins and ask him to come beside the fire, while the rest go into the kitchen to toast them,' whispered the elder sister kindly. Away trooped the children, and Myrtle led the way to the fireside.
- 'It is uncommon kind of you, Miss, I'm sure,' said Sam, as he took off his linen turban and sat down opposite Myrtle, with Bluff clinging fast to his arm. 'I little thought I should fall in with this here youngster, when I took up with this new line of making an honest living.
- 'Have you been at it long, Sam?' asked Bluff, who by this time had settled himself fairly on his knee, and nestled his curly head on his old mate's shoulder.
- 'A goodish bit, young un. I give up the old life six weeks after you cut and run. The fact is that I met with an accident, and it

give me time, Miss, to think a deal about what you said to us that day in the flower garden, leastways, the churchyard. Then I missed the little chap; and it worried me above a bit to think that he would never have gone so willin' if I'd kep' as kind as I begun. thing seemed to say out very loud at me, "Sam, you are a bad lot," It made me feel uncommon down I can tell you, Miss, and Master-for Bluff here looks the regular heavy swell if ever I saw one-and then, somehow, while father was boasting of his prigging, and mother and the girls was laughing at him, and encouraging him in his dangerous ways, a voice said to my heart quite plain, "Old chap, you turn over a new leaf." And it kep' at it day and night, "Sam, turn over a new leaf," till I ups and outs, and stops the very first parson I meets, and I says to him straight out, "Please, sir, can you tell me how to turn over a new leaf?" He was a young parson in a wideawake hat, and a short coat, and there was something about him that looked real manly. He had blazing kind o' dark eyes, and he glared at me for a minute as if he would burn his way right into

my heart; and then he says in a queer, gruff, yet kind way, "Come home to my lodgings, we are close to them." So I went, and we had a deal o' talk, and he prayed with me; and told me about Jesus dying on the Cross so that all the world might be helped to turn over a new leaf. He helped me wonderful, he did; and now I go regular to his night-school, and I am learning how to live a Christian life,' and Sam leaned his head down upon Bluff's, and let a tear fall on the soft, fair hair.

'We are learning that, are we not, Myrtle?' asked Bluff, earnestly, but Myrtle could not answer just then.

Presently the tea-tray was brought in; and then the busy toasters appeared, and Sam took his place at the table and had the pleasure of eating his share of the muffins. Before he went away, he told the rest of his story, and this time all the children clustered round him while Bluff maintained his former position on his knee.

'When I took up with a Christian life I thought what a hard thing it would be to pick up a living on the square, and I telled the

parson so. Says he, "Sam, you put your trust in your new Master, and see if He don't treat you a deal better than ever the devil did." And I says, "Well, sir, I'll give Him the chance, anyhow." Now would you believe it. but the very next afternoon I passed a shop in the Kingsland Road where they sell nothing but muffins, and it came into my head to go in and ask if they wanted a boy to go round with um; and who should the master be but my teacher in the night-school. "Hullo, Sam," he cried out directly he clapt eyes on me; and the long and short of it is that he took me on regular, and now he says I'm such a good chap to ring my bell and sell my stuff, that he has set me on this new beat to try and start a country trade.'

'Are you likely to succeed?' inquired Myrtle doubtfully, for she could not see where any people lived who would be likely to patronise him often.

'I believe I shall, Miss, in time. I'm finding just which roads to take, and there are some parts where the folks are finding out how nice a well toasted muffin or crumpet is. I have fresh ones sent down every day, and I never give up for the night till I'm about cleared out.'

'Where do you sleep, Sam?' asked Bluff wonderingly; for though no one knew better than the child how to pass a night in London, he could not imagine any one daring to be homeless during the dark hours where the trees stood in their ghostly majesty amid the oppressive silence of nature.

'Where do I sleep? not in a kennel anyhow,' said Sam good-naturedly. 'Well, I mostly pays fourpence for a bed in the town, but I'll almost as lieve turn in under a haystack, for I meet with nothing but a bad lot of tramps in the lodging-house, and they don't help much towards what I'm aiming at with the help o' that same parson.'

'What is he like?' asked Bluff.

'What aint he like,' replied Sam with admiration. 'He is a regular knowing one anyhow; it is not easy to take him in, as the chaps find at the night school. He is terribly in earnest against the drink for one thing, and he spends a deal of his time visiting the sick folks; then he's always, week days and Sundays, almost wearing hisself out with trying to

get his people to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. He is very partial to children, and I have heard that in the summer he brings a many out to the forest wot have never seen the country before.'

'You are fortunate in having found such a friend,' Myrtle observed sympathetically. 'I hope Bluff will not lose sight of you again, for he has fretted after you at times; besides, we shall want some more muffins, shall we not, children?'

'I say,' said Stoker in a stage whisper to Sam, 'I suppose you don't know which day you would be likely to come to Oak Circle again and to take Ivy Chimneys on your way?'

'What do you say to this day week?'

'All right,' answered the boy with a wink, 'I'll have a fire ready that will brown 'em—you see if I don't.'





### CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE HOUSE ON THE HILL.

'Led on by heaven and crowned with joy at last.'

HEN Mona heard by letter from time to time of Myrtle's dreams hopes, and enterprise, she felt tempted to envy her useful career.

Her time she feared was spent in rather a thriftless way, but she was tied to her father's side, and they spent the seasons in constant travelling; so that any good which she could hope to do must be by scattering seed along the wayside, and trusting that it might take root and spring up in due season.

Mr. Stevington did not gain strength, but as the doctors still said 'travel,' he obeyed their orders, and at least ceased to speak of resuming the old life in Canonbury, and, indeed, seldom looked forward to the future at all. Sometimes they stayed for weeks in one place, at others they moved on every few days, so that it was impossible for Mona to form her life on any other rules than those of faith and love. She watched her father with a grave anxiety, for she could not blind herself to his failing powers, and she dreaded what this might end in. She devoted herself to his comfort and amusement with untiring love, and while doing so she felt herself upheld by an unseen hand, and sustained by 'a very present help.'

They were in Madeira when Myrtle wrote to tell them that her work was growing so rapidly that within twelve months from starting she had been obliged to occupy several of the smaller cottages, and that she believed, in time, they would take up all the colony.

'Sometimes, dear Mona,' so ended the letter, 'I sit in my own room, and still dream dreams, and indulge in castle building; even now, when of all practical young women I am the most practical. The fact is that I am tempted to it by the sight of the old red brick mansion which is now known as the farm. It

is such a grand old house, with spacious rooms, and any number of attics and cellars, as well as outbuildings, that I am tempted to take possession, and enlarge my borders. could work the farm under a proper manager: the girls do all the housework: and in that case I might be spared the bitter pain of closing my doors against some of the poor destitute children who will otherwise be left to the tender mercy of the streets. Indeed I am beginning in earnest to put the question to myself whether God does not call me to give Him my all, and then trust Him to find what I am unable to supply. My tenant at the farm has thoughts of leaving, so I will wait and see what his final decision is; and should he decide to go, I do not think I should wish Mr. Mills to relet the place. Some of my children have begun to earn money, and I put it by for them; so that when they are older it may help them towards a start in life. heard from Willie last week, who wrote from India; he told me that he would promise to find openings for some of my boys when they are old enough to go out into the world, if they have a mind to try life in the colonies.

This is to be Willie's last two years' cruise, for he is going to serve in a line of ships that only run between London and the chief Australian ports; so that he hopes to see a good deal of the work at Ivy Chimneys.'

Mona answered this letter by one of congratulation, and a little prudent advice about not undertaking too much until Myrtle was sure of her ground. And then her thoughts were fully taken up with Mr. Stevington, who fell seriously ill, and after a weary recovery took it into his head to try what effect a long voyage would have upon his health, and at last the pair embarked in a sailing vessel for Sydney. Before they had been on board three weeks, Mona felt sure that her father would never live to return to England, and she feared lest he should die before reaching land.

Those long weeks which spread out into months were terrible to Mona, for in their lagging hours she watched her father fade away, and her heart rebelled against the possible necessity of committing his beloved form to the cruel waves. As she watched his failing strength and heard him speak peacefully of the blessed haven to which he gladly looked

forward, Mona vowed that if God would let her lay him to rest beneath the turf, she would not grieve or repine because she was left alone, a stranger in a strange land.

And God heard her prayer; for as the good ship entered Sydney's world-famed harbour, her father called her softly to his side and said,

- 'Are we in port, my darling?'
- 'Yes, father; in port, thank God, at last.'
- 'I thank Him for your sake, my child. My voyage is not quite over; I hear the hoarse billows of eternity sounding nearer and nearer, and already I see the lights of the far off eternal shore; but the Saviour is walking along the waves and I have no fear. In port, did you say, my darling?—yes—in port at last.'

#### \* \* \* \* \*

One by one the passengers took their leave of the ship and went on shore, till Mona alone was left to keep watch beside the dead. A little later, a solemn *cortège* left the vessel, and proceeded to a cemetery, where Mona laid her father reverently to his final rest; and then with patient grief turned back to make the

best of a world which was so bitterly empty now that he had left it.

The captain, who throughout the whole voyage had proved himself a friend and consoler, took the desolate stranger to a Christian home, where loving hearts did their utmost to lighten her grief. Mona did not forget her answered prayer: she bore her loss with sweet resignation, though she would not entertain the thought of returning to her bereaved home until time had helped to soften her early sense of loss.

Thus time went on, and Myrtle in her rural home had the happiness of her brother's return and presence. During his stay how he seemed to wake up their energies, and to infuse new life into their efforts. His manly, commanding bearing impressed the boys no little, and they were all seized with a sudden enthusiasm for the life of a sailor, till Myrtle declared that she had better put up her shutters, and advertise the cottages for letting.

It was a relief to her that Willie looked upon her proceedings with unqualified approval, for she had often dreaded that he would blame her for the independent course she had adopted. He went into everything with ready sympathy, and his knowledge of men and business suggested several ways in which he could come to his brave sister's help.

For one thing, he looked farther ahead than she had yet done, for until he led her thoughts in that direction, she had not troubled about the future of her children excepting in the vaguest way.

One lovely summer night after the lamp was lit in the hall and the children were in bed, Willie persuaded Myrtle to take a walk along the lane, where the nightingales were beginning to call the one to the other; so she put a light wrap round her shoulders, and let him lead her which ever way he felt inclined. It was a perfect summer night, when the stars gleamed out of the fast fading opal tints of sunset which seemed loth to die away, and the glow-worms—those exquisite stars of the earth—lit up the hedgerows' fringe of dewy green. It was the very hour in which to wander with the dear companion of her childhood, and to talk over all the strange history of the past.

Myrtle's heart rose in thankfulness as she

realised that henceforward she and Willie would never be separated in affection and aim. She could bear to let him leave her for the voyages, almost without regret, now that he was living to God; and when he told her that each year he would spend three months in England, when she could rejoice in his love, and profit by his counsel. They spoke of that sad night when their mother died; and even of that sadder time when Willie disappeared, and Myrtle was left in solitude of heart, to live on in the old monotony; but they went on to talk of the present, and then of the mysterious future which shone upon them bright with hope.

Myrtle had been speaking of her work when Willie changed the conversation by saying, 'Little woman, how old are you?'

- 'More than twenty-three, and not quite twenty-four.'
- 'Really; now that is a nice age enough, yet all the same you talk in a queer way considering that you are both so old and yet so young.'
  - 'What do you mean, Willie?'
  - 'There is one very ordinary event which

you never seem to remember, and yet which generally plays a considerable part in a pretty girl's life—and a plain one's too, as far as that goes.'

Myrtle was silent.

- 'You talk, young Hardheart, as though you never took it into your calculations that some fine day you may want to get married.'
- 'I am married to my children,' said Myrtle, laughing.
- 'It is easy to dissolve a marriage of that kind, dear. Tell me truly, have you never thought that some day you may wish to take care of children of your own; and in that case what would you do?'
- 'I thought of all that before I began,' replied Myrtle, with a sweet grace, 'and at one time it almost kept me back to the old selfish life; but I fasted, and prayed, and God showed me His will; and so I simply follow on. I do not think I shall ever be called on to choose between my work and my happiness, for I believe they will be identical; but even that I leave to my Master, feeling quite sure that He will not make any mistake.'

Is was Willie's turn to be silent, so he lit

a second cigar, and after a pause started a fresh subject. 'Mr. Mills tells me that you have refused to touch the larger part of your fortune: how is that, Myrtle?'

'Simply because I have never considered it mine. Dear Willie, I hope you do not think that I could take advantage of a fault on your part. Father never meant the money to be mine.'

- 'Then he should not have left it to you.'
- 'Do not press that point, for I shall never accept it.'

'Very well; if you are positive about that, I'll realise, and give the money to some charitable institution; for it would go against my conscience to use what I really forfeited by my disobedience. Do you know what the property is?

'No, do you?'

'Yes. I have been talking to Mr. Mills about it only to-day. When our father left England, he provided for you (in case of his death) by leaving you Ivy Chimneys, and for me, by investing in some safe shares to about the same value. Now your estate is of less value than it was fifteen or twenty years ago,

but these shares have lately gone up to a surprising figure, so that if they were now sold, they would realise enough to buy Ivy Chimneys and five or six places like it. Now my advice is that you do realise, and endow your good house with the money so that it shall evermore be a home for outcast children; and thus, either in case of your marriage or death, the work would go on, and your purpose be fulfilled.'

Myrtle was speechless with the delight of the thought. She felt sure that she would never turn her back upon her happy lifework, but over death she held no power; and she had sometimes been afraid of what might befal her children when death came, as come, some day, it must.

As they turned towards home, they came in view of the farmhouse upon the slope of the hill. In the valley the cottages nestled in the darkness, but higher up, behind the woods, the moon had risen, and with her tender light was flooding the chimneys and gables of the old mansion.

Willie and Myrtle paused beneath a thorn where a nightingale was pouring forth its song

of ecstacy, and as their glance rested upon the moonlit home half-way up the hill, and then upon the other's face—each eloquent of youth and holy purpose—the girl rested her head upon her brother's shoulder, and with a sigh of mixed feeling, she said,

'You have conquered, Willie. We will set apart the whole of Ivy Chimneys for God's work.'

We must here take leave of Myrtle: but though the future was veiled in mystery to her eyes, it is our privilege to hold back the curtain and reveal some of its secrets.

On a distant shore, we see a subdued mourner won back to hope and happiness by the watchful love of her child friend's brother. We hear the echo of childish laughter in the old home at Canonbury; for it was there that Willie Shaxon and his wife Mona returned; and beneath the familiar roof she still loves, and prays, when he is away at sea.

Though we peer far into the coming years, we never see the time when Myrtle wearies of her loving care for the homeless little ones; but we do see a day when Ivy Chimneys, from

mansion to cottage, is one scene of expectation and happiness, because the young mistress is coming home after being away for several weeks.

There is no one so excited as Sam the gardener, because while to all others Myrtle's husband is a stranger, to him he is the only man in the world who is fit to mate with their young lady; for he is none other than the minister who so successfully helped Sam 'to turn over a new leaf.'



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